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# THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

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# THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

*A STUDY IN THE APOSTLES' CREED*

BY

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HON. CANON OF ELY; HON. CHAPLAIN TO THE KING

ἐξουσίαν ἔχει ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου
ἀφιέναι ἁμαρτίας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς.
ἄν τινων ἀφῆτε τὰς ἁμαρτίας,
ἀφέωνται αὐτοῖς.

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THE following pages contain the substance of a course of lectures given at Cambridge in the spring of 1915 to a class consisting chiefly of candidates for the ministry of the Church of England. Some of the materials have been supplied by earlier courses on Confession and Absolution (1902), and the New Testament Doctrine of Sin (1907), and I have also used a course on Penitence which was addressed to the clergy of Leeds in 1903. Much of the first and third parts of this book was given in the form of Lenten instructions at St. Mary's, Hitchin, during the Lent of the present year.

H. B. S.

HITCHIN, *July* 1916.

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# FOREWORD

THE Forgiveness of Sins has a place in all complete ancient creeds. While some of the *credenda* are peculiar to the East and others to the West, this article is common to East and West. The creeds differ, it is true, in their manner of stating it; the Western creeds say simply, "I believe in the Forgiveness of Sins" (*credo in ... remissionem peccatorum*);[1] the Eastern specify the primary means of forgiveness: "We acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins" (ὁμολογοῦμεν ἓν βάπτισμα εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν).[2] But all alike recognize the place which the Forgiveness of Sins holds in the Christian Faith. There is no article in the creed which is more primitive or more universal: none which more deeply touches

[1] Three Spanish creeds read *in remissionem omnium peccatorum* (Hahn, §§ 54, 56, 58). For *remissionem* the Irish MS. of the sixth century, known as the Bangor Antiphonary, has *abremissionem*, on which see Warren's *Bangor Antiphonary*, ii. p. 68 f. On *credo in* see *Holy Catholic Church*, p. 259 ff.

[2] Cyril of Jerusalem has καὶ [πιστεύομεν] εἰς ἓν βάπτισμα μετανοίας εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν. The creed of the Apostolic Constitutions follows the Western form (βαπτίζομαι ... εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν).

the life or more surely reflects the experience of all sincere Christians.

The position which this article holds in the creeds is significant. It is found invariably in the third division, which treats of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Church; and in that division it follows the mention of the Church[1] and the Communion of Saints (when the latter is named), and precedes the Resurrection of the flesh or of the dead, and the life everlasting or of the world to come. There is design in this order: it represents the Forgiveness of Sins as the first great asset of membership in the Body of Christ, and the necessary precursor of the resurrection to eternal life. "After the mention of 'the Holy Church' (writes St Augustine) there follows 'the Forgiveness of Sins,' for it is by reason of this forgiveness that the Church stands."[2] And again: "if the Church had no forgiveness to offer, there could be no hope of the life and liberty of the world to come."[3]

[1] Cyprian (*ep.* 70) quotes from the interrogatory creed of the African Church: "Credis in vitam aeternam et remissionem peccatorum per sanctam ecclesiam?" Cf. Aug. *serm.* 215 "credimus in Spiritum sanctum, remissionem peccatorum, carnis resurrectionem, et vitam aeternam per sanctam ecclesiam." Similarly, the old Armenian creed, which alone of Eastern creeds has "communionem sanctorum" (*Holy Catholic Church*, p. 158), proceeds: "We believe in the forgiveness of sins in the Holy Church" (Hahn, p. 155). But this African arrangement is no real exception to the general rule: the Church is in thought anterior to the forgiveness that comes through it.

[2] Aug. *enchir.* 17. [3] Aug. *ep.* 213. 8.

The phrase "forgiveness (or remission) of sins" (ἄφεσις ἁμαρτιῶν) seems to have been of Christian origin. It does not occur in the Greek Old Testament, though it may have been suggested by Isaiah lxi. 1 (LXX κηρῦξαι αἰχμαλώτοις ἄφεσιν); nor has it been discovered hitherto in the Greek of the papyri.[1] In the New Testament it is used fairly often—ἄφεσις ἁμαρτιῶν or the like occurs thirteen times, ἀφιέναι ἁμαρτίας some thirty times[2]—but its use in the creeds is probably due to the earliest Christian tradition rather than to the direct influence of the New Testament. The forgiveness of sins had not only been taught by our Lord and His Apostles, but it was the most outstanding fact in Christian experience. No conviction was more deeply rooted in the mind of primitive Christendom than that all pre-baptismal sins were washed away in the bath of the New birth; that all baptized men and women had risen from the baptismal water released from the guilt of their old sins, and at liberty to serve the Lord Christ. Every member of the Church in the first days was able to say out of a full heart, "I believe in the forgiveness of sins"; "I acknowledge one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins"; I confess that sins are

[1] So, at least, I gather from the silence of Moulton and Milligan, *Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*, s.v. ἄφεσις.

[2] The phrase, εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν, is used in connexion with Baptism in Mark i. 4, Luke iii. 3, Acts ii. 38; cf. Acts xxii. 16, 1 Cor. vi. 11, Eph. v. 26, Heb. x. 22, 2 Peter i. 9.

remitted in the Holy Church. To the early Church the baptismal gift of forgiveness was the most certain of facts, and on it was based the whole superstructure of the Christian life here and the greater life of the world to come.

# I

# THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS IN THE BIBLE

Κύριος ὁ θεὸς οἰκτείρμων καὶ ἐλεήμων, μακρόθυμος καὶ πολυέλεος καὶ ἀληθινός . . . ἀφαιρῶν ἀνομίας καὶ ἀδικίας καὶ ἁμαρτίας, καὶ οὐ καθαριεῖ τὸν ἔνοχον.

Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7.

ἐάν τις ἁμάρτῃ, παράκλητον ἔχομεν πρὸς τὸν πατέρα Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν δίκαιον, καὶ αὐτὸς ἱλασμός ἐστιν περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν, οὐ περὶ τῶν ἡμετέρων δὲ μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου.

1 John ii. 1, 2.

## CHAPTER I

# THE OLD TESTAMENT DOCTRINE OF SIN

No one who reads the Old Testament with any attention can fail to be struck by the prominence which is everywhere given to the fact of Sin. No critical study is needed to make this evident; it lies on the surface of the present Hebrew canon. The first two chapters of Genesis describe a sinless world, but in the third chapter Sin starts upon its way, and its course is marked by loss and misery. Sin drives the first man and woman out of the Garden of God; slays righteous Abel, and brands guilty Cain; drowns the world at the Flood, destroys the Canaanites before Israel, crushes Israel itself under the heel of Assyria and Babylon. National sins are the burden of the Prophets, personal sinfulness is the grief and at times the despair of the Psalmists. So full is the Old Testament of the consciousness of sin that its pages, notwithstanding their fascinating histories, have a sombre hue which repels many who are attracted

by the light-hearted gaiety of the nearly contemporary literature of Hellas.

The Old Testament regards Sin as a revolt against the supreme authority of God. Thus, in the early[1] story of the Fall, the first sin is represented as an act of simple disobedience. To eat the fruit of a particular tree is in itself neither good nor evil; the sin of Adam and Eve lies in their refusal to obey an express command of God. "Rebellion," Saul is told by Samuel, "is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as idolatry,"[2] *i.e.* the spirit which sets itself in opposition to God, and defies His authority, involves no less guilt than the most flagrant of direct offences against religion. Sin is seen to be directed against God Himself, and is judged by His view of it; thus, throughout the historical books a sinful course is described as "doing evil in the sight of the Lord."[3] Even offences against fellow-men are measured by this standard. David, confessing the wrong he had done to Uriah, exclaims, "I have sinned against the Lord,"[4] and the author of the fifty-first Psalm, whether David himself

[1] Gen. ii. 4–iii. 24 is attributed to J; the story of the Flood has affinities with early Babylonian legend. See Ryle, *Early Narratives of Genesis*, p. 35 f.; Skinner, *Genesis*, p. 90 ff.

[2] 1 Sam. xv. 22.

[3] See *e.g.* 2 Kings xv. 18, 24, 28; xvii. 2; xxi. 2; xxiii. 32, 37; xxiv. 9, 19. In quoting from the Old Testament I have usually followed the R.V. in keeping "the Lord" for Jahweh, giving the actual Name only when perspicuity seemed to require it.

[4] 2 Sam. xii. 13.

or some later Psalmist who had David's sin in view, goes so far as to say, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned,[1] and done this evil in thy sight." The mind of the Israelite poet is so possessed by the thought of God that he regards sin as directed against God alone: no room is left for other considerations. This deeper sense of the evil of sin, which is characteristic of the Hebrew literature, and especially of the Psalms, proceeded not so much from a conscience more sensitive than the consciences of other ancient peoples as from a truer sense of the moral nature of God and of His relation to man, especially to the nation which He had taken into covenant with Himself.

Yet the Old Testament doctrine of Sin has its limitations. These are most evident in the earlier books of the Hebrew canon. The older parts of Genesis indeed contain some remarkable examples of insight into the nature of Sin, as where the Jahvist writer, speaking of the wickedness of man before the Flood, says that "every imagination of the thoughts of his heart" was "only evil continually."[2] But such deeper views of the inwardness of Sin are rare in

[1] Dr Emery Barnes (*Lex in corde*, p. 152) translates: "Against thee, O Only One, I sinned"; remarking, "There is but One moral Ruler of the Universe; if there be sin, it is against him, the Only God."

[2] Gen. vi. 5 (כָּל־יֵצֶר רַע). For the later use of יֵצֶר (הָרָע, הַטּוֹב) see Buxtorf, or the *Oxford Hebrew Lexicon*, *s.v.*, and cf. Tennant, *The Fall and Original Sin*, p. 169 ff., and the remarks on p. 14 ff., below.

the Pentateuch and the historical books. In the Levitical legislation it appears to be regarded almost exclusively as the neglect or violation of ceremonial rules. Even the moral code of the Ten Words specifically denounces only sins of act, with the exception of the last commandment, which traces sin against a neighbour to its root in the covetings of a rebellious heart.[1] Yet the Law, imperfect as it was, bore its part in the evolution of the doctrine of Sin. For it was based on the fact that Israel as a nation was in covenant with God. The Covenant of Sinai, following upon the Covenant with Abraham, brought Israel into yet closer relations with Jahweh, and thus increased the heinousness of the sins committed by members of the Chosen People. Sin under the Law was not merely an offence against the Creator, but a breach of the solemn contract which God had made with His people. The charge, "My covenant they brake,"[2] could be laid against Israel alone of all the nations of the earth; and though the sins recognized by the Law were chiefly external acts of wrong-doing or neglect of ritual duty, the seriousness of these was vastly increased by the knowledge that every such sin was a breach of a Divine covenant.[3]

In the historical books another cause makes for a

[1] Cf. Rom. vii. 8. [2] Jer. xxxi. 32.

[3] Ch. Schultz, *O. T. Theology* (E. tr.), ii. p. 1 ff.; Kautzsch, 'Religion of Israel' in Hasting's *D.B.* iv. p. 630 ff.

relatively narrow view of Sin. Under the Kings of Israel and Judah circumstances gave prominence to one particular sin, that of idolatry, and Israel and Judah are judged to have done evil or good in the sight of the Lord according as they fell into this sin or in a good reign escaped it. Idolatry, no doubt, especially in the foreign cults of the Phoenician Baal and Ashtoreth and the Ammonite Molech, was fruitful in all kinds of moral evil, and it was pre-eminently unfaithfulness to the God and Spouse of Israel, to whom the nation was bound by the most sacred obligations. But the prominence which is given to this one sin has necessarily cast into the shade other sins which were less obvious but not less destructive of fellowship with God. Little account is taken in these books of lust and pride and secret unbelief, or of the general condition of the heart. It was enough for the time to emphasize the sinfulness of the one great act of rebellion which was hurrying Israel and Judah to national ruin.

But if the 'former prophets,' to whom we owe the histories, dwell little on any sin but idolatry, the 'latter prophets' had already begun, during the period covered by the Books of Kings, to teach the larger truth. In the Prophets, Sin is far more than neglect of a prescribed ritual, more even than the treason of a foul heathen cult. Amos, who prophesied while Uzziah was reigning in Judah and Jero-

boam II. in Israel, condemns not only the calf worship at Bethel (iii. 14), but the selfish luxury of the rich in Israel (iii. 15, v. 11) and their oppression of the poor (iv. 1), together with the estrangement from God which was at the root of both (iv. 6 ff.). Five times the prophet, after describing the judgements which were upon the land, ends with the refrain, "Yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord." In these circumstances sacrifices could not help them, no outward acts of religion could atone: "I hate, I despise your feasts, and I will take no delight in your solemn assemblies; yea, though ye offer me your burnt offerings and meal offerings, I will not accept them" (v. 4). Israel's sin was the greater because of their unique position as the people of God: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will visit upon you all your iniquities" (iii. 2). A few years later Hosea is no less severe: "There is no truth nor mercy nor knowledge of God in the land," he writes; "there is nought but swearing and breaking faith and killing and stealing and committing adultery" (iv. 1 f.). He sees quite clearly that the root of all these evils lies in the nation's alienation from God: "The spirit of whoredom hath caused them to err; they are gone a whoring from their God" (iv. 12). About the same time the first Isaiah was prophesying in Judah, and the picture that he draws is equally depressing:

"Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that deal corruptly; they have forsaken Jahweh, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they are estranged and gone backward" (i. 4).[1] Micah, the contemporary of Isaiah the first, bears similar witness: "Woe to them that devise iniquity, and work evil upon their beds! when the morning is light, they practise it, because it is in the power of their hand; they covet fields, and seize them, and houses, and take them away" (ii. 1 f.). ... "the rulers of the house of Israel ... hate the good and love the evil" (iii. 2). "I am full of power by the Spirit of the Lord ... to declare unto Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin" (iii. 8). The prophets of the last days of Jerusalem and of the Exile carry this plain speaking a long step further; to a sense of national corruption and degradation they add a consciousness of personal sin and guilt. Thus Jeremiah writes with an insight which anticipates the New Testament, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and it is desperately sick; who can know it?" (xvii. 9). Ezekiel for the first time teaches quite explicitly the doctrine of personal responsibility[2]: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father,

[1] See also Isa. i. 10 ff., ii. 6 ff., iii. 8 ff., xxix. 13. In Isa. vi. 5 the confession, "I am a man of unclean lips," is followed immediately by "I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips." [2] See p. 25 f.

neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him" (xviii. 20). And the great unnamed prophet who is known as the second Isaiah, exhorts with the fervour of an evangelist, "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord" (Isa. lv. 6).

From the Prophets we turn to the Psalmists. If in the Prophets we have the teaching of the preachers of Israel between the ninth and the fourth century before Christ, the Psalms express the mind of the devout in Israel during a still longer period; and the Psalmists speak not as the teachers of the nation, but out of the experience of their own hearts. We may therefore expect to find in them an appeal to individual experience which the Prophets do not make, and at the same time a wider outlook upon human life as a whole. The Psalmists look beyond the narrow limits of their own nation, and find sin everywhere. Two Psalms, or rather two recensions of the same Psalms (xiv., liii.), dwell on the universality of human sin and guilt. "The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, that did seek God." The all-seeing Eye passes from shore to shore, from Palestine

to Babylonia, to Egypt, to Greece, the great centres of world-power and culture. But with what result? Are things better in Egypt or Babylonia and Hellas than in Israel? Nay, all men are alike: "they are all gone aside, there is none that doeth good, no not one." Sin is everywhere, in all lands, in every life. There is no other statement of the universality of sin in the Bible which is more comprehensive, and St Paul quotes it as the witness of the Law (*i.e.* of the Old Testament) to the fact that Jew and Gentile are all "under sin" (Rom. iii. 9 ff.; cf. 19).[1] But if the Psalms teach that sin is universal, they insist not less strongly upon the personal sin and guilt of the individual. The Psalmists do not shrink from confessing their sinfulness. "I acknowledge my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid" (xxxii. 5). "My sin is ever before me; ... behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me"[2] (li. 3, 5). "O God, thou knowest my foolishness, and my sins are not hid from thee" (lxix. 5). "I have gone astray like a sheep that is lost"—so Psalm cxix. ends, although every verse witnesses to the piety of the writer.

[1] See Rom. iii. 10 ff., where St Paul cites Ps. xiii., working it into a catena of extracts from the Greek O.T.; cf. *Introd. to the O.T. in Greek*, ed. 2, p. 251 ff.

[2] *i.e.* sin is an inherited disease, a taint passed on from mother to child. How far back the taint began the Psalmist does not say; see below, pp. 14 ff., 43 ff.

The Wisdom-literature of the Old Testament reduces to single brief sentences or epigrams the judgements which earlier writers in the canon had passed upon Sin. Proverbs is rich in such brief practical summaries: *e.g.* x. 19, "In the multitude of words there wanteth not transgression"; xxiv. 9, "the thought of the foolish is sin"; xiv. 9, "the foolish make a mock at guilt"; viii. 36, "he that sinneth against me (Wisdom) wrongeth his own soul"; xxviii. 13, "he that covereth his transgression shall not prosper." Similarly the "Preacher" in Ecclesiastes, "To the sinner he (God) giveth travail" (ii. 26); "though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and prolong his days, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God ... but it shall not be well with the wicked" (viii. 12). Ecclesiasticus follows on the same lines (xvi. 11, xvii. 23 ff., xxi. 1 ff., xxxv. 3).

But of all the Wisdom-books the book of Job shews the deepest sense of sin. It deals with the subject from a particular point of view, the relation between sin and suffering; but in doing so, incidentally it throws a strong light on the later Jewish doctrine of Sin. The problem before the writer is one which men in all ages have sought to solve, Why do the righteous suffer? Job is "a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God and escheweth evil" (i. 8), and yet there falls upon him an overwhelming succession of disasters. The friends of

Job who come to comfort him in his distress maintain that his sufferings are the measure of his sins. "Know," says one of them, "that God exacteth of thee less than thine iniquity deserveth" (xi. 6). "What is man," another moralizes, "that he should be clean, and he which is born of a woman that he should be righteous? Behold, he (God) putteth no trust in his holy ones (the angels), yea, the heavens are not clean in his sight; how much less one that is abominable and corrupt, a man that drinketh iniquity like water" (xv. 14 f.). "How then," asks a third, "can man be just with God?" Job on his part does not deny that he may have sinned and deserved punishment: "if I sin, then thou markest me, and wilt not acquit me from mine iniquity" (x. 14). But he resents the imputation that he has been guilty of sins either so many or so great as to have called for so extraordinary a visitation. "How many," he appeals to God, "are mine iniquities and sins? make me to know my transgression and my sin" (xiii. 23). Of human nature, indeed, he has no very exalted view: "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one" (xiv. 4). But he is not conscious of any sins of his own which offer an adequate explanation of his sufferings; if he has sinned above other men, as upon the theory of his friends he must have done, his transgression is hidden from him; it is sealed up in a bag, and God alone knows

what it is (xiv. 17). So at length Job's friends cease to argue the point with him, seeing he is "righteous in his own eyes" (xxxii. 1). Even Elihu intervenes to little purpose. Then God Himself takes up the controversy, and answers Job out of the whirlwind, with the result that Job sees both God and himself in a new light. "I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear," he exclaims, "but now mine eye seeth thee; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (xlii. 5 f.). At the same time the position taken by Job's friends is shewn to be untenable; great suffering is not, as they supposed, a sure indication of great guilt; in Job's case it is the prelude of great prosperity, and the teaching of the book as a whole is that of Proverbs iii. 12: chastening is a sign of God's fatherly love.

The Hebrew canon is silent as to the origin of human sin.[1] There are in the later books a few references to the story of the Fall, but they shew no disposition to connect it with the entrance into the world of sin and death.[2] There are intimations that sin is hereditary, but no canonical writer traces this heritage back to Adam; and this fact is the more remarkable because the Old Testament fully recog-

[1] See Tennant, *The Fall and Original Sin*, p. 91 ff.

[2] After Gen. iv. Adam is named only in Deut. xxxii. 8 (A.V.) and Job xxxi. 33; Eden only in Isa. li. 3, Ezek. xxviii. 13, xxxi. 9, 16, 18, xxxvi. 35. In Isa. xliii. 27, "thy first father sinned," refers to Jacob, the progenitor of the Hebrew people, not to Adam.

nizes the universality of sin, the corruption of the whole race of man. It is in the non-canonical books that the tendency to attribute universal sinfulness to the Fall first makes its appearance. Thus in Ecclesiasticus (xxv. 24) we read: "From a woman was the beginning of sin, and because of her we all die." The Book of Wisdom says (ii. 23 f.): "God created man for incorruption, and made him an image of His own proper being; but by the envy of the devil death entered into the world, and they that are of his portion make trial thereof." The later Jewish apocalypses carry on this teaching, but are careful to guard against such a use of it as would obscure the freedom of the will and the responsibility of the individual. Thus the Apocalypse of Baruch says (liv. 15 ff.): "Though Adam first sinned, and brought untimely death upon all, yet of those who were born from him each one of them has prepared for his own soul torment to come... each one of us has been the Adam of his own soul." The fourth Book of Esdras speaks more certainly of Adam's fall as involving his posterity (vii. 48); the grain of evil sown in the heart of the first man bears fruit to this day (iv. 30). Jewish doctrine ultimately settled down into the form which is found in the Talmud, according to which the 'evil impulse' that is natural to man gained an ascendancy through the Fall. The Fall involved the race in guilt and death;

sin, however, is not a transmitted taint, but due in each case to the act of the individual.[1] This does not amount to a doctrine of Original Sin, but it exceeds the teaching of the canonical books of the Old Testament, which, while emphasizing the evil and the universality of sin, are silent with regard to its source.

[1] Weber, *Jüdische Theologie*, p. 218 ff.

## CHAPTER II

# THE OLD TESTAMENT DOCTRINE OF FORGIVENESS

THE story of the Fall has been thought not only to offer an explanation of the presence of sin and death in the world, but to suggest the way in which victory over both may be expected to come. The words in which sentence is pronounced upon the Serpent, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel," have been called the Protevangelium, and regarded as the earliest prediction of the triumph of the Cross. Even the Targums understand the words to foretell the victory of Israel "in the days of King Messiah[1]"; while Christian writers, from Irenaeus[2] downwards, have found in the seed of the woman the

[1] Skinner, *Genesis*, p. 80.

[2] Irenaeus, iii. 23. 7 "venit Semen praedestinatum calcare caput eius, quod fuit partus Mariae." *Ibid.* iv. 40. 3 "inimicitiam hanc Dominus in semetipsum recapitulavit, de muliere factus homo, et calcans eius caput."

Virgin's Son, who came to destroy the works of the devil. The promise, however, does not, so far as the words go, guarantee more than a world-long conflict between the Serpent and the family of man, together with the sure hope of ultimate victory for our race: a conflict in which, though humanity must suffer, devilry will receive a fatal blow. It is the final triumph of righteousness which is foretold rather than the Atonement made upon the Cross, and of forgiveness there is as yet no word. In the story of Cain and Abel we meet a similar promise to the individual who resists temptation: "if thou doest not well, sin croucheth at the door; unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him."[1] *I.e.* 'the wild beast of irrational anger in a man lurks at the door of his heart, ready to spring, if the door is opened to him; but meet him with courage, and thou shalt make thyself his master, and get him under and keep him there.' Here again is encouragement to resist the Tempter, but no mention of forgiveness for sins already committed.[2] It is not of forgiveness that the early books of the canon speak, but of punishment

[1] The text, however, is open to suspicion. See Driver and Skinner, *ad loc.* Prof. van Hoonacker, of Louvain, suggests (*Expositor*, VIII. ix. p. 454) the reading לפתח חטא תרבין, "thou art crouching at the door of Sin," *i.e.* 'thou art Sin's slave.'

[2] The LXX makes Cain say (iv. 13), μείζων ἡ ἁμαρτία μου τοῦ ἀφεθῆναι με (מִנְּשׂוֹא; cf. R.V. mg.). But, as Driver remarks, "the context (iv. 14) speaks only of Cain's punishment," and not of the forgiveness of his sins.

for the guilty and rewards for the righteous. Adam dies on the day that he sins;[1] if the sentence is not immediately carried out, his life is henceforth a way to the grave; he is expelled from Eden and goes forth along the years a condemned man, to meet his doom. The Lord is represented as repenting that He has made man; it grieves Him at His heart, and the Flood sweeps away the whole race except eight persons. If Noah and his family are spared, it is because Noah is a righteous man, and perfect in his generation.[2] A fresh beginning is made with the family of Abram, and it is sealed by a fresh covenant; but the covenant contains no provision for the forgiveness of sins. So the history proceeds till we reach the revelation of the character of Jahweh made to Moses at Sinai, which opens up a vision of hitherto unsuspected mercy. "The Lord passed by before him and proclaimed: Jahweh, Jahweh, a God full of compassion and gracious, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin,[3] and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children." If this came from a Jahvist source and not from the compiler of JE,[4] it is of singular interest as anticipating

[1] Gen. iii. 3, 17 ff. [2] Gen. vi. 9.

[3] חַטָּאָה, פֶּשַׁע, עָוֹן, LXX *ἀνομία, ἀδικία, ἁμαρτία.* See Additional Note, p. 191 f.

[4] Cf. Driver, *Introduction*, p. 36.

and even exceeding in some respects the fulness and tenderness of later revelations. Yet its graciousness is tempered by the severity which marks the concluding words. They raise more than one question to which the Old Testament supplies no complete answer. How, it may be asked, can mercy be kept for thousands if the guilty are by no means to be cleared? How can the mercy of God be free to act while His justice demands satisfaction? And is it just for the iniquity of the fathers to be visited upon their children?

The Levitical code offered a partial and temporary solution for the first of these difficulties by providing piacular sacrifices in atonement for certain offences. Such were the trespass (A.V.) or guilt (R.V.) offering,[1] and the sin offering,[2] which made satisfaction in specified cases. There was also an annual expiation on the Day of Atonement for the sins of the nation, the purpose of which was "to purge away the guilt of all sins, committed during the year, that had not been already expiated by penitence or by the special *piacula* appointed for particular offences."[3] But even if it had been possible for the blood of animal sacrifices to take away sin, it is to be remembered that "the range of the Levitical atonements was very narrow"; they were available only

[1] אָשָׁם (Lev. v. 16). [2] חַטָּאת (Lev. iv. 25).

[3] Robertson Smith, *Religion of the Semites*, p. 408.

in cases of "bodily impurity, ceremonial offences, sins of ignorance, and certain specified trespasses";[1] and did not profess to touch wilful or deliberate sins. An Israelite who had broken a Divine command with full knowledge and purpose could not be helped either by guilt-offering or sin-offering; "that soul," the Law declares, "shall utterly be cut off, his iniquity shall be upon him."[2]

A more effective provision for the relief of the conscience was made by the requirement that piacular offerings should be preceded by confession of sins. "The offerer," we read, "shall confess that wherein he hath sinned," and then bring his guilt offering.[3] Similarly in the Day of Atonement the High Priest confessed over the live goat "all the iniquities of the children of Israel and all their transgressions, even all their sins."[4] A remarkable passage near the end of Leviticus contemplates a time when under heavy chastisement the nation will confess its sin and accept the punishment, upon which God will remember His covenant with their ancestors, and not destroy the people utterly.[5] There seems to be a reminiscence of this passage (if it is the earlier of the two) in the prayer of Solomon at the dedication of the Temple, where the king entreats the Lord to

[1] Westcott, *Hebrews*, p. 288.

[2] Num. xv. 30.

[3] Lev. v. 5 ff.; Num. v. 7.

[4] Lev. xvi. 20 ff.

[5] Lev. xxvi. 40 ff.

hear His people when in evil times they pray towards that holy place; "if there be in the land famine, if there be pestilence, what prayer and supplication soever be made by any man, or by all thy people Israel ... hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and when thou hearest forgive." "If they sin against thee (for there is no man that sinneth not), and thou be angry with them and deliver them to the enemy ... yet if they shall bethink themselves ... and turn again, and make supplication unto thee ... saying, We have sinned ... if they return unto thee with all their heart and with all their soul ... then hear thou their prayer and their supplication ... and forgive thy people which have sinned against thee."[1] The Chronicler adds the answer that came to the king's prayer: "if my people ... shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."[2] The whole context is remarkable for its very explicit recognition of repentance, confession, and prayer, even at a distance from the appointed place of prayer, and therefore without the offering of the prescribed sacrifices, as ensuring forgiveness and release from punishment.

The Prophets, with their deeper sense of national sinfulness, entertain more spiritual views of the

[1] 1 Kings viii. 30 ff. [2] 2 Chron. vii. 12 ff.

nature and conditions of forgiveness. They see more clearly than other men how forgiveness is to be found. In a classical passage (vi. 6 ff.) Micah points out with singular frankness the insufficiency of material sacrifice. "Will Jahweh be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?[1] He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" To amendment of life as a condition of pardon Hosea (xiv. 1 ff.) adds the confession of sin: "O Israel, return unto Jahweh thy God, for thou has fallen by thine iniquity. Take with you words, and return unto the Lord; say unto him, 'Take away all iniquity.'" To this the Divine answer comes: "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely; for mine anger is turned away from him." But the promise is conditional, and there is still the note of wrath to be heard as well as the note of grace; for the book ends: "The ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them; but transgressors shall fall therein" (xiv. 9). The first Isaiah has a similar offer of provisional acceptance (i. 16 ff.): "Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings...

[1] For the doctrine that human sacrifices availed above all others, see 2 Kings iii. 27, xxi. 6.

come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord ; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow ; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool " ; *i.e.* the greatest, the most flagrant of sins vanish out of God's sight when the sinner turns to Him and forsakes his sin. But this great promise (for such, notwithstanding some recent criticisms, it probably is) is guarded by the menace, " If ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword" (*v.* 20). Writing in the evil days before the Exile, Jeremiah proclaims forgiveness for Judah if it will repent ; thus he says (vii. 3), " Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place " : and, again (xxvi. 34), " It may be they will hearken, and turn, every man from his evil way, that I may repent me of the evil which I purpose to do unto them." It is only when the great refusal has been made, when it has become evident that Judah will not repent or turn to God, that the prophet gives up all hope of his own generation (xviii. 12 ff., xxxii. 23 ff.). Even then he does not despair of ultimate conversion and pardon ; the future, he is assured, will bring both : " I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it, and I will be their God . . . I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin will I remember no more " (xxxi. 33 ff.). What God demands as preliminary to forgiveness is not more of external religion, but a radical change of heart :

"I spake not unto your fathers not ... concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices, but this thing I commanded them, saying, 'Hearken unto my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people'" (vii. 22 f.). It is the old lesson taught long ago by Samuel but not yet learnt, "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams."

The Exile seems to have deepened the sense of personal responsibility, as times of great suffering are apt to do. It was given to Ezekiel to emphasize this hitherto scarcely recognized truth. The exiles complained (xviii. 1 ff.) that they were suffering for the sins of their forefathers: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes," they cried, "and the children's teeth are set on edge." Ezekiel will not permit this saying to pass unrebuked.[1] Each man, as St Paul taught long afterwards, shall bear his own burden. Nevertheless a place of repentance is left for the wicked, for the individual as well as for the nation: "If the wicked turn from all his sins that he hath committed ... he shall surely live, he shall not die" (xviii. 21). "I have no pleasure," this remarkable chapter ends, "in the death of him that dieth; wherefore turn yourselves and live" (xviii. 32). So the sternness of the discipline which visited the

[1] The Law had refused to allow the father to be put to death for the son, or *vice versa* (Deut. xxiv. 16; cf. 2 Kings xiv. 6).

iniquity of the fathers upon the children is relaxed in so far as the supreme penalty is concerned; no man shall die because of the sin of his progenitors. Of the heritage of suffering which men by their sins may bring, even upon a remote posterity, the prophet does not speak; to this day it is one of the darker mysteries of the Divine dealings which we cannot entirely penetrate—a reminder of the all but infinite potentialities for evil that sin possesses.

In the Psalms the doctrine of forgiveness following upon repentance and confession is exemplified from the experience of devout Israelites, who are conscious that they have sinned and have been forgiven. "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered; blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity." How does the Psalmist know this? He has the witness in himself: "I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord, and thou forgavest me the iniquity of my sin" (xxxii. 1-5). "I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me . . . purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me and I shall be whiter than snow . . . a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise" (li. 3, 7, 17). "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgiveth all thine iniquities, and healeth all thy diseases. . . . The Lord is full of compassion and mercy; he will not always

chide, neither will he keep his anger for ever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us after our iniquities. For as the heaven is higher than the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him" (ciii. 2 ff.). "If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared ... with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption." Such words reach the high-water mark of faith and hope as they were known under the Old Covenant.

The Wisdom-books add little to the witness of the Prophets and the Psalms. In Job (xlii. 8) we have an early witness to the power of intercession for the erring: "My servant Job shall pray for you," is said to Job's 'comforters'; "for him will I accept, that I deal not with you after your folly." Proverbs (xxviii. 13) sums up the teaching of the Old Testament in the words, "He that covereth his transgressions shall not prosper, but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall obtain mercy." The Book of Wisdom sees a merciful purpose in the chastisements of God: "Thou convertest by little and little them that fall from the right way, and putting them in remembrance by the very thing wherein they sin, dost Thou admonish them, that escaping from their wickedness they may believe in Thee, O Lord" (xii. 2); but on the forgiveness of sins it is silent. The son of

Sirach follows the old lines of guarded tenderness for sinners: "The Lord is full of compassion and mercy, and He forgiveth sins"; "as His majesty is, so also is His mercy" (ii. 11, 18); adding the warning, "Concerning atonement, be not without fear, to add sin upon sins; and say not, 'His compassion is great, he will be pacified for the multitude of my sins'; for mercy and wrath are with him, and his indignation will rest upon sinners" (v. 5 f.). But the book has also a sterner voice: "Help not the sinner; for the Most High also hateth sinners" (xii. 4, 6); on the whole, the message of Ecclesiasticus is 'Death to the sinner, life to the righteous,' and it has little encouragement for any but such as are already servants of God.

From this examination of Old Testament teaching upon the forgiveness of sin certain limitations come clearly into sight. (1) No revelation is made in the Hebrew canon of the way in which the mercy of God in forgiving sins is made to consist with the justice which demands the punishment of the guilty. Contrition, confession, amendment of life open the way to better things in the time to come, but make no adequate satisfaction for the sins of the past. But the exercise of mercy where no adequate satisfaction has been made, seems to be both arbitrary and unjust. The Old Testament penitent is conscious of being forgiven, and tastes the blessedness of a state of acceptance with God, but he knows not what has

become of the guilt of his sin, or how forgiveness has come to him. He trusts in the mercy of God, and does not trust in vain; but of a great central act of reconciling love he knows nothing. He lacks, therefore, all those great motives of love and obedience, and those high hopes of a future sinless life which the New Covenant has brought to ourselves. (2) Although the Old Testament writers, more especially the Prophets and Psalmists, are not silent about the forgiving mercy of God, the Hebrew canon as a whole has more to say about the punishment of sin. "Be sure your sin will find you out"[1] is the prevailing note, and it is heard continually not only in the earlier books but even in certain Psalms and in the Wisdom-literature. Offers of mercy are usually guarded by stringent conditions, or modified by solemn warnings. Fear is urged as a motive rather than love; appeal is made to the dread of wrath more often than to the constraining power of the Divine compassion. (3) The range of the forgiving mercy of God, as it was seen in Old Testament times, is narrow indeed. It was limited to the covenant people. There are no promises of forgiveness for the great heathen world, for Egypt or Assyria, or the isles of the sea and the Greek West. The message of mercy did not pass the bounds of the little strip of land along the eastern shore of the

[1] Num. xxxii. 23.

Mediterranean where the descendants of Abraham had their dwelling. Here and there a poem or a prophecy contemplates a future conversion of the nations to the religion of Israel, as when Psalm lxvii. prays, "God be merciful unto us, and bless us, and cause his face to shine upon us, that thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations.... God shall bless us, and all the ends of the earth shall fear him." But as yet there is no Gospel of forgiveness for the Gentile races, nor is it contemplated that they will be forgiven on any other terms than those of admission to the covenant of circumcision and subjection to the Law. The story of the mission of Jonah to Nineveh is the one exception; it may be taken as shewing a real desire to bring the call to repentance home to the great heathen nations. But the displeasure of Jonah when Nineveh was spared[1] is significant; the Israelite would have resented any effort of this kind. The conversion of the world formed no part of the religious policy of Israel or Judah. Nor was the time ripe for the preaching of even a limited forgiveness to the world. Before Christ came there was a pretermission of the sins of the heathen world, rather than a remission;[2]

[1] Jonah iv. 1 ff.

[2] Rom. iii. 25 διὰ τὴν πάρεσιν (not ἄφεσιν) τῶν προγεγονότων ἁμαρτημάτων ἐν τῇ ἀνοχῇ τοῦ θεοῦ. Cf. Acts xiv. 16 ἐν ταῖς παρῳχημέναις γενεαῖς εἴασεν πάντα τὰ ἔθνη πορεύεσθαι ταῖς ὁδοῖς αὐτῶν. xvii. 30 τοὺς μὲν οὖν χρόνους τῆς ἀγνοίας ὑπεριδὼν ὁ θεός, κτλ.

there was no summary or condign punishment upon the sins of heathendom; God, as it seemed, overlooked them, till the time came when a worldwide call to repentance could be made, and a worldwide forgiveness proclaimed.

## CHAPTER III

# THE NEW TESTAMENT DOCTRINE OF SIN

THE teaching of the Prophets and Psalmists of the Old Testament was taken up and carried on by the Forerunner and by the Lord Himself at the beginning of His ministry in Galilee. The Baptist's call, "Repent ye, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand," and the call of the Christ, "The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent ye, and believe in the Gospel,"[1] reproduce the message of the Old Testament with added force and larger meaning, in view of the near approach of the new age which the Prophets had foretold. But the appeal with which the Ministry began does not seem to have been repeated. If we expect to find that sin, repentance, and forgiveness form the main subjects of our Lord's early preaching, we shall be disappointed. His very name suggested, as St Matthew has remarked, that He came to

[1] Matt. iii. 2; Mark i. 14.

"save His people from their sins."[1] Yet neither sin nor salvation enters directly or largely into the Sermon on the Mount, which may be taken as either a summary or a specimen of His original teaching. It is not what would now be considered as an evangelical discourse; it is concerned with the setting up of new and higher standards of life rather than with denunciations of sin, or pointing out the way to escape from it. Instead of proclaiming a Gospel of reconciliation, it enacts a new law which is to fulfil and not to destroy the old;[2] instead of offering forgiveness, it demands a righteousness which is to exceed that of the religious guides and teachers of the time.

The Lord's first aim was, in fact, to demolish the false standards of righteousness which had been set up by the Pharisaic Scribes;[3] for not until this had been done could the Gospel of forgiveness be preached with any success. The cry of the Scribes was 'Back to the Law,' and the Law, as they understood it, was the embodiment of the legal spirit which is satisfied by the bare performance of certain external acts of obedience. Moreover, by way of 'fencing' the Law[4] and guarding it from breach or

[1] Matt. i. 21. See McNeile's note.

[2] Matt. v. 17 ff.

[3] *οἱ γραμματεῖς τῶν Φαρισαίων* (Mark ii. 16).

[4] Cf. C. Taylor, *Saying of the Fathers*, p. 54: "R. Aqibah . . . used to say, 'Tradition is a fence to Thorah.'"



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irreverent handling, they had accumulated in the Halacha a vast body of traditional by-laws which had a constant tendency to supersede the legislation which they were supposed to protect.[1] And thus, under colour of being zealous for Torah, they made void the word of God by their tradition.

So long as this system dominated the religious life of the Jewish people, there was no place left for a true conception either of righteousness or of sin. Hence the early teaching of Jesus, as represented by the Sermon on the Mount, was devoted to the preparatory work of creating fresh standards of life; and this purpose was more or less in view during the whole course of the Galilean ministry. Nevertheless, as time went on, He found opportunities for disclosing the true character of sin, and unlocking chambers in the depths of human nature into which the prophets of the Old Testament had not penetrated. The first of these occasions arose in connexion with the call of the tax collector, Levi-Matthew.[2] The new disciple had invited his colleagues of the custom-house to meet Jesus at supper, where He was doubtless the principal guest. "Why," asked the Scribes

[1] Dr C. Taylor (*op. cit.* p. 105) quotes from the Talmud: "Words of Soferim are akin to words of Thorah, and more beloved." "It is added (Dr Taylor continues) that whereas the Thorah contains both *light* and *weighty* precepts, the words of the Soferim are all of the latter class."

[2] Mark ii. 15 ff. (=Matt. ix. 10 ff.; Luke v. 29 ff.).

of the disciples of Christ, "eateth your Master with the publicans and sinners?"—those outcasts from Israel with whom no good Jew will keep company.[1] The Lord overheard the question, and answered it. "The strong[2] have no need of a physician, but they that are sick." Sin, He teaches, is soul-sickness, calling for a physician of souls. The analogy between sickness and sin is not unknown to the writers of the Old Testament;[3] Jesus adds, 'The physician of souls is here: it is I.'

Sin is, also, moral pollution. The Pharisees remarked that the disciples of Jesus neglected the ceremonial washing of the hands which tradition required before a meal.[4] "Why," they asked, "walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders?" The Lord met their question with another: "Why do ye for your part transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition?" and He gave an instance in point.[5] The Pharisees seem to have had no answer ready, and withdrew; whereupon our Lord took the opportunity of impressing the lesson of the incident on the crowd who had witnessed their discomfiture. 'Nothing external to man

[1] ἁμαρτωλοί. See my note on Mark ii. 15.

[2] οἱ ἰσχύοντες (Mc., Mt.), οἱ ὑγιαίνοντες (Lc.).

[3] See *e.g.* Isa. i. 5 ff., Jer. xvii. 9 (R.V.).

[4] Mark vii. 1 ff.

[5] The plea of *corban*, used to evade the duty of supporting parents in their time of need (Mark vii. 10 ff.).

can really defile him ; defilement comes from within.' This teaching was new to the disciples ; it was a parable, a dark saying that needed interpretation. The Lord explained to them that sin alone really pollutes, and that sin comes from within. All sins have their source in the heart, in the central depths of man's nature : from the inner man come not only evil thoughts and covetousness, but such evil deeds as thefts, murders, adulteries ; all have their origin in the man himself, and not in his surroundings.

In this utterance again the doctrine of sin is carried beyond the point reached in the Old Testament. That sin pollutes, that the heart is polluted by it, had been taught by the prophets ; that the heart is the ultimate source of moral pollution was new teaching, and it struck at the root of the externalities of the prevalent religion, and opened the door to a new way of dealing with the problem of human sin. If the source of sin is in the heart, it is to the heart that the remedy must be applied.

Another view of sin is given in the three great parables of Luke xv. Once again the cavillings of the Pharisees gave occasion for further teaching. "This man," they murmured, "receiveth sinners and eateth with them." The Lord replied in a trilogy of parables—the lost sheep, the lost coin, the lost son. His purpose is to justify the Divine Love which seeks and reclaims the lost ; but incident-

ally He places in a new light the nature and effects of sin. One sheep out of a hundred goes astray; one coin out of ten is dropped; one son out of two leaves his home and wastes his father's substance in a strange land. In each case there is alienation, loss, frustration of purpose: in the last, where the teaching reaches its climax, all is due to the voluntary action of a responsible moral agent. The lost son does not follow, like the stray sheep, a blind animal impulse; he is not lost, as the coin is lost that accidentally slips out of its owner's hand; his ruin is of his own doing. Sin in man is an act of the will, which chooses evil in preference to good, the world instead of God.

St Matthew has preserved for us another illustration. Sin is a debt. This conception, which is "thoroughly Jewish,"[1] appears first in his recension of the Lord's Prayer, where the fifth petition runs, "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."[2] We are God's debtors by our sins, as the words that follow shew: "for if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if ye forgive not men their trespasses neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

[1] McNeile, *ad loc.*

[2] ἄφες ἡμῖν τὰ ὀφειλήματα ἡμῶν, ὡς καὶ ἡμεῖς ἀφήκαμεν τοῖς ὀφειλέταις ἡμῶν (Matt. vi. 12). Luke has a trace of the same figure: ἄφες ἡμῖν τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἡμῶν, καὶ γὰρ αὐτοὶ ἀφίομεν παντὶ ὀφείλοντι ἡμῖν (xi. 4).

A parable which is peculiar to the first Gospel[1] is based on this view of sin. It imagines a King who has entrusted his servants with sums of money, and calls them to account for what they had received. One was found who owed ten thousand talents, about two millions and a half of our money. The man could not pay, upon which an order was made for the sale of his wife and children and property to liquidate the debt or a part of it. The debt represents the guilt of sin,—what the sinner is accountable for. It is so vast that no effort on the part of the sinner can discharge it, however long a time is given him for payment. His only hope is in the mercy of his creditor. The debt may be remitted: it cannot be paid.

The fourth Gospel reviews the teaching of Christ from the standpoint of the last years of the first century, and adds much fresh material to the Synoptic record. One change in reference to our present subject strikes us at once when we open the Gospel of St John. It speaks almost uniformly of 'sin,'[2] while the Synoptists use the plural. The singular is probably preferred in the latest Gospel, because it represents all moral evil as "one in its essence, though its fruits are manifold," and as having "one

[1] Matt. xviii. 23 ff.

[2] The plural is used by St John only in viii. 24, ix. 34, xx. 23. In i. 29 he has *τὴν ἁμαρτίαν τοῦ κόσμου*. *Τὰς ἁμαρτίας* is a liturgical adaptation: see Wordsworth-White, *ad loc.*

fatal source."[1] The singular, it may be added, gives solidarity to the sins of mankind, gathering them up into one vast mass which can be dealt with as a whole.

Further, St John has his own way of describing sin; if the other Gospels speak of it as disease, defilement, loss, a debt which no man can pay, the fourth Gospel represents it as slavery. "Every one that committeth sin," our Lord teaches in John viii. 34, "is the bond-servant of sin,[2] and the bond-servant abideth not in the house for ever." The sinner is not a permanent member of the family of God. It is the Son who abides in the Divine household, and the Son alone can liberate the slaves of sin, and set them free indeed by making them sons of God.

Another interesting feature in the fourth Gospel is its doctrine of the sinlessness of Jesus Christ. "Which of you," our Lord demands from a hostile crowd at Jerusalem, "convicteth me of sin?"[3] The challenge was not met. In their own circle the Pharisees were bold to say, "We know that this man is a sinner"; but when confronted with Jesus, they could not substantiate the charge. There was one exception to the universality of sin; the race had at last produced

[1] Westcott on St John viii. 21, 24.

[2] δοῦλός ἐστιν τῆς ἁμαρτίας (cf. Rom. vi. 16 ff.).

[3] τίς ἐξ ὑμῶν ἐλέγχει με περὶ ἁμαρτίας;

a Son of Man who knew no sin. But the exception was unique. "He that is without sin among you," the Lord is reported to have said to the accusers of the woman taken in adultery, "let him first cast a stone at her"; and the crowd melted away,[1] till Jesus was left alone with the accused. "When he (the Spirit) is come, he will convict the world of sin."[2] The world which could not convict the Christ must itself be convicted by the Spirit of Christ—a prophecy which was verified on the Day of Pentecost, and is fulfilling itself to-day wherever the Gospel is carried by the Church.

From the teaching of our Lord, as it is given by the Synoptists and by St John, we come to the teaching of His greatest Apostle. St Paul was not only of Pharisaic descent, but more than twenty years after his conversion he could still claim to be a member of the party.[3] He was still with the Pharisees in their opposition to the Sadducean teaching; he "walked orderly, keeping the Law,"[4] and his epistles shew

[1] John viii. 7 (the *pericope de adultera*). The words ὑπὸ τῆς συνειδήσεως ἐλεγχόμενοι (FG11K) are doubtless a gloss, but one which rightly interprets the fact. Another gloss (U, some minuscules) represents our Lord as having written on the ground the sins of each (ἔγραφεν εἰς τὴν γῆν ἑνὸς ἑκάστου τὰς ἁμαρτίας).

[2] John xvi. 8 ἐλέγξει τὸν κόσμον περὶ ἁμαρτίας. It will be observed that the same phrase is used as in ch. viii. 46.

[3] Acts xxiii. 6 ἐγὼ Φαρισαῖός εἰμι, υἱὸς Φαρισαίων: cf. Phil. iii. 6 κατὰ νόμον Φαρισαῖος.

[4] Acts xxi. 24 στοιχεῖς καὶ αὐτὸς φυλάσσων τὸν νόμον.

how lasting was the impression made upon his intellectual habits by rabbinical methods of interpretation.[1] But the Pharisaic ideals of righteousness had been for him completely destroyed by the vision of Christ. Looking back toward the end of his life to early days, he saw that, in view of what he had then been and done, his place was in the first rank of sinners.[2] Sin is with St Paul the most outstanding fact in human life as it is lived apart from Christ, and he feels that no true estimate of the greatness of the Gospel can be formed until the greatness of sin has been duly recognized. Sin is for him the dark background against which is displayed the glory of the grace of God. He seems to find it impossible to paint sin too black, or to exaggerate the evils of its sway over mankind. The Epistle to the Romans has for its subject the righteousness of God and the justification of man ; yet the first three chapters are almost wholly occupied with the doctrine of sin. A terrible indictment of the vices of the heathen world[3] is followed by a picture, scarcely less repulsive, of the insincerity, the hollowness and lack of all inwardness and depth in the religious life of Judaism.[4] There is, in fact, as the Law itself had confessed, no distinction here between Jew and Gentile : all sinned (ἥμαρτον),

[1] See Thackeray, *Relation of St Paul to Contemporary Thought*, *passim*.

[2] 1 Tim. i. 15 ὧν πρῶτός εἰμι ἐγώ.

[3] Rom. i. 18 ff.

[4] Rom. ii. 17 ff.

and all fall short (ὑστεροῦνται), in the present as in the past, of the glory of God,[1] *i.e.* of the Divine image and likeness to which human nature was destined to attain.

Sin, then, according to St Paul, is the universal failure of human nature to reach the standard of a Divine righteousness, to fulfil the purpose for which it was made. In a later chapter[2] he is careful to point out that the failure of the race is reflected in the experience of the individual. "I am carnal, sold under sin; for that which I work, I know not, for I do not practise the thing that I would, but I do the thing that I hate.... So then it is no more I that work it, but Sin which dwelleth in me; for I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing, for to will is present with me, but to work that which is good is not. For the good which I would I do not, but the evil which I would not, this I practise." If the reference here is to St Paul's own experience or to the experience of the awakened, converted, or regenerate soul, the testimony which it bears to the power of sin is the more weighty. There is, it appears, even in the regenerate a tendency that makes for sin; —a stronghold in which sin still dwells. The lower self in man, the seat of desire and passion and impulse,

[1] Rom. iii. 19, 23. On the ὑστέρημα implied in ἁμαρτία see Add. Note, p. 191.

[2] Rom. vii.

or, to use the Apostle's term, the flesh, offers sin a foothold which it does not entirely abandon to the end of life. But in the members of Christ there is also a better, higher self, a spiritual nature, on which the Spirit of Christ works, which delights in the law of God, and hates evil even when it is betrayed into doing it. In such there is a life-long conflict; the flesh lusting against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh.[1] The Spirit gradually gains the ascendant; but the victory is not won quickly or without reverses and the danger of final defeat.

St Paul's rabbinically trained mind is attracted by the question, Whence this persistent grip of sin upon human nature? How did it originate? As we have seen, the question was present to the mind of more than one post-canonical Jewish writer, and St Paul to some extent follows the lines already marked out, and even carries the later teaching beyond the point which it had reached in Jewish thought. "Through one man," he writes, "sin entered into the world, and death through sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all sinned" (ἐφ' ᾧ πάντες ἥμαρτον).[2] In the last words there is some ambiguity. Do they mean that all men die as Adam died, since all follow the example of his sin? Or is the

[1] Gal. v. 17.

[2] Rom. v. 12. On the rendering of ἐφ' ᾧ by *in quo* (*i.e.* in Adam) see Sanday and Headlam, *Romans*, p. 133; Wordsworth-White, II. i. 85.

sense, "All men sinned in Adam's sin, since Adam represented the whole of his posterity"?[1] The latter interpretation is supported by the comparison which is drawn, a few verses further,[2] between the two Adams, the one man whose disobedience "came unto all men to condemnation," and the one by whose obedience "many are made righteous." In both cases the act was representative, and its effects extended to the whole race. All men sinned when Adam, the first head of the race, sinned; and death, the penalty of sin, became the portion of all. This is not a doctrine of Original Sin; it is not the transmission of sin as a taint inherited from Adam that St Paul teaches here, but rather the imputation to all men of Adam's guilt, and their consequent subjection to its penalty, death. That the infection of Adam's sin was communicated to the race is a natural inference from the facts, but it does not seem to be involved in St Paul's view of the Fall.[3]

Of the relation of sin to death St Paul has much to say. Death is "the wages of sin." "The body is dead," even in believers, "because of sin." On

[1] Cf. 2 Cor. v. 14 εἷς ὑπὲρ πάντων ἀπέθανεν· ἄρα οἱ πάντες ἀπέθανον.

[2] Rom. v. 15-19.

[3] Eph. ii. 3 ἤμεθα τέκνα φύσει ὀργῆς ὡς καὶ οἱ λοιποί is often quoted in this sense, but the words imply only that there is in man's nature "that which issues in sin," and that "actual sin . . . deserves God's wrath till an atonemount is found" (Westcott, *ad loc.*). See also J. A. Robinson, *Ephesians*, p. 50 f.

the other hand, "the sting of death is sin," so that where sin is remitted, physical death, however terrible in appearance, is without the power to harm.[1] But physical death is the outward and visible sign of a death which destroys spiritual life. Men may be "dead through their trespasses and sins," even while they walk this earth. They are so, if they are "alienated from the life of God," which alone is "life indeed."[2] It is this deeper, inner death that the Apostle has in mind when he connects death with sin; bodily death is but the shadow which the death of the spirit casts upon life: to be "without God in the world" and to have "no hope"[3] of a life beyond, this is the substantial penalty of sin, a penalty which has its beginnings in this world, and follows the soul into the next.

Of the non-Pauline Epistles only three make any considerable contribution to the Christian doctrine of sin: the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Epistle of St James, and the first Epistle of St John. The witness of Hebrews must be examined at some length when we come to consider the New Testament doctrine of forgiveness; meanwhile attention may be called to the writer's teaching on the subject of temptation There may be temptation where there is no sin; it was so in the human

[1] Rom. vi. 23, viii. 10; 1 Cor. xv. 56.
[2] Eph. ii. 1, iv. 18; 1 Tim. vi. 19. [3] Eph. ii. 12.

life of Jesus Christ, who having been Himself "in all points tempted like as we are without sin," and having "himself suffered being tempted," is "able to succour them that are tempted." Temptation, however, is insistent and dangerous: "the deceitfulness of sin" may harden us, destroying the sensitiveness of the new spirit to the touch of evil; it has enjoyment (ἀπόλαυσιν) to offer, which is attractive while it lasts; it "easily besets us," surrounding us on all hands, clinging to us and not to be escaped without effort.[1] St James has more on the same subject. Whence comes temptation to sin? Not from God, who "cannot be tempted with evil," and "himself tempteth no man," but from the sinner's own heart; "each man is tempted when he is drawn away by his own lust and enticed." The writer proceeds to trace the process. Lust, when she has conceived, bears Sin, and Sin, when it is full grown, bringeth forth Death; *i.e.* Sin is the child of Lust, and the parent of Death.[2] Of practical warnings against particular sins, St James is full. "Respect of persons," a faith which is inoperative and dead, an unbridled tongue, the spirit of jealousy and faction, of covetousness and hate, reluctance to do the good we know, inconsiderateness in the treatment of inferiors, impatience, swearing, are all deprecated

[1] Hebrews ii. 18, iii. 13, iv. 15, xi. 25, xii. 1.
[2] James i. 13 ff.

as contrary to the Christian character.[1] St James does not spare the sins of the Jewish Christians to whom he wrote. "Cleanse your hands, ye sinners," he preaches, "and purify your hearts, ye double minded." "Go to, now, ye rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you."[2] The tone is that of the Old Testament prophet; but it is opportune in its witness to the ethical character of New Testament Christianity.

The first Epistle of St John has several interesting references to sin. It approaches more nearly than any other New Testament writing to a definition: "Sin is lawlessness" (iii. 4); "all unrighteousness is sin" (v. 17).[3] That is to say, it is of the essence of sin that it defies the Divine authority; all that opposes itself to the Divine righteousness is sin. Something like a classification of sins is also to be found in this Epistle. "All that is in the world," it says, "is not of the Father but is of the world;" and it specifies three things, "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the vainglory of life" (ii. 16), a list which, though it is clearly not exhaustive, embraces the most conspicuous occasions of sin in the non-Christian world. Christians have sins of their own, which

[1] James ii. 1, 26; iii. 1 ff., 14 ff.; iv. 1 ff., 17; v. 4 f., 9, 12.

[2] James iv. 8, v. 1.

[3] *ἡ ἁμαρτία ἐστὶν ἡ ἀνομία . . . πᾶσα ἀδικία ἐστὶν ἁμαρτία.* In the second instance the terms are not convertible; not every sin is an *ἀδικία*, though every *ἀδικία* is a sin.

should be frankly confessed: "if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us"; worse than that, "we make God a liar" (i. 8, 10), for we question the truth of His word which teaches the universality of sin. Nevertheless, from another point of view, the same Epistle declares that "whosoever is begotten of God doeth no sin, because his seed abideth in him, and he cannot sin because he is begotten of God" (iii. 9); and again, "We know that whosoever is begotten of God, sinneth not, but he that was begotten of God keepeth him, and the evil one toucheth him not" (v. 18). If it be asked how these passages can be reconciled with the strong denials in chapter i. of the sinlessness of believers, the answer seems to be that in chapter i. St John has in view the occasional lapses into sin of which all Christians are conscious, whereas in chapters iii. and v. he thinks of the habits of sin which dominate unregenerate life. Or, to put the matter in another light: sinlessness is the ideal of our life in Christ, as it was the glory of His own life among men. "He that saith he abideth in him, ought himself also to walk even as he walked." The goal is not actually reached by us; there are falls in the best lives. But such lapses are "accidents"—they "do not touch the essence of man's being." In the Christian life sin can never become normal or regular; if it does, the life ceases to be Christian. St John

gives two reasons for this: (1) the Divine seed of our new birth remains in us and repels the attacks of the enemy; and (2) the Only begotten Son keeps His faithful members, so long as they abide in Him.

Another point which St John makes is to draw a broad distinction between "sin unto death" and "sin not unto death" (v. 26 f.). This distinction has its roots in the Old Testament, which recognizes in wilful sins that are 'committed with a high hand,'[1] —the "presumptuous sins" of Psalm xix. 13, a class of offences for which no legal atonement could be made. For one particular sin of this type, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, the Lord Himself has said that there is no forgiveness either here or in the coming age.[2] St John does not go so far as this: but he divides the sins of men into two classes, for one of which the Church may ask forgiveness with the assurance that her prayer will be heard, while with regard to the other no such confidence can be felt, and prayer cannot be prescribed as a certain remedy. But what constitutes an offence a "sin unto death" he does not say; obviously the remissibility of any sin may depend upon circumstances: the same act may be a sin unto

[1] Dr Brooke, *ad loc.*, remarks: "The phrase [*ἁμαρτία πρὸς θάνατον*] is probably suggested by the O.T. conception of sins, ביד רמה (Num. xv. 30, cf. 31). We may also compare Num. xviii. 22 [where the LXX has *ἁμαρτίαν θανατηφόρον*]."

[2] Mark iii. 29 *οὐκ ἔχει ἄφεσιν εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, ἀλλ' ἔνοχός ἐστιν αἰωνίου ἁμαρτήματος.* Matthew paraphrases: *οὐκ ἀφεθήσεται αὐτῷ οὔτε ἐν τούτῳ τῷ αἰῶνι οὔτε ἐν τῷ μέλλοντι.*

death or not unto death according as it was deliberate and committed with full knowledge, or due more or less to heedlessness or ignorance. The Lord's plea for the soldiers who crucified Him, "They know not what they do,"[1] and St Paul's words, "I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief,"[2] justify this view. Our imperfect knowledge of the motives of other men makes it difficult to use St John's directions in particular cases, and there is perhaps hardly any sin which is so certainly "unto death" that we need hesitate to pray for the conversion and pardon of the sinner. It is only the Church that can "retain sins" by the solemn act of public excommunication, and even in the case of the excommunicate it is still permissible to pray that the soul may be saved in the day of the Lord. All the judgements of 'man's day' are provisional, and may be reversed or greatly modified by the Supreme Judge when He comes. There are in His sight gradations of evil-doing unobserved by us; where two offences may seem to involve equal guilt, He who said to Pilate, "He who delivered me unto thee hath greater sin,"[3] will know how to apportion to each the exact measure of blame or praise which the case deserves. There may be sins "unto death" which will not

[1] Luke xxiii. 34. St Peter extends this plea to the Jewish people, and even to their rulers (Acts iii. 17).

[2] 1 Tim. i. 13. [3] John xix. 11. Cf. Luke xii. 47 f.

ultimately receive the extreme penalty, and sins that in themselves are "not unto death," which are the precursors of final ruin.

The Apocalypse of John, whether the work of the author of the Gospel and Epistles of St John or of another writer of that name, presents the doctrine of sin in some new lights. Our sins are chains and fetters, from which the Sacrifice of the Cross has loosed[1] us (i. 5), as well as defilements from which the Blood of the Lamb has washed us clean (vii. 14). It is fully recognized that the churches and their members are far from the sinlessness which is the ideal of the Christian life: of the seven churches in Asia, one has left its first love; another has the name of being alive, but in truth is dead; another is lukewarm, and while it boasts that it has need of nothing, is in fact "wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked."[2] The call to repentance comes again and again in the messages to the churches; if they repent not, the alternative is that Christ will come to them in judgement and remove their candlestick out of its place, taking from them the opportunity which they have neglected of shining as lights in the heathen world.[3] Nevertheless each message ends with a promise to individual members of the Church who

[1] λύσαντι ℵAC: λούσαντι rests on inferior authority.

[2] Apoc. ii. 4; iii. 1, 15 ff.

[3] Apoc. ii. 5. 16; iii. 3, 19.

overcome in the great struggle with sin. Victory and not defeat, life and not death, is the goal of the Christian life. "He that overcometh shall inherit these things"; he "shall not be hurt of the second death" which awaits sinners in the world beyond the grave.[1]

[1] Apoc. ii. 11, xxi. 7 f.

CHAPTER IV

# THE NEW TESTAMENT DOCTRINE OF FORGIVENESS

THE first note of the Gospel of Forgiveness is struck in the song which St Luke puts into the mouth of Zacharias the father of the Forerunner: "thou, [child,] shalt go before the face of the Lord ... to give knowledge of salvation unto his people in the remission of their sins."[1] The son of Zacharias, grown to manhood, fulfilled this prediction by preaching a baptism of repentance unto remission of sins.[2] The Lord, when His own ministry began, added to the Baptist's call to repentance a call to faith: "repent, and believe in the Gospel."[3] What the Gospel means becomes clear as the ministry advances. At Capernaum, in the early days, when a paralytic was brought to Him for healing, and He saw the faith of those who

[1] Luke i. 76.

[2] Mark i. 4.

[3] Mark i. 15 *καὶ πιστεύετε ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ*. On the unique *π. ἐν τῷ εὐ.* see my note *ad loc.* Faith in the message was the first step to faith in the Person it revealed.

brought him, His first word was "Son, thy sins are being forgiven";[1] when the Pharisees objected, "Who can forgive sins but one, even God?" He claimed and proved by a miracle that the Son of Man had power on earth to forgive sins. This claim at once distinguished Him from His Forerunner and from the Prophets of the Old Testament.[2] They had authority to preach forgiveness to the penitent; Jesus pronounced it. Two things are worthy of remark here. (1) The Lord makes His power to absolve rest, not on His unique relation to God, but on a grant made to Him as Man.[3] (2) The Gospels contain remarkably few instances of the exercise of this prerogative during our Lord's lifetime. To the woman who "loved much" He said, "Thy sins have been forgiven";[4] and in a few other cases He remitted sins not directly, but in effect.[5] But such instances are rare in the Gospels. It would seem that though His power was to be used on earth, the time for using it freely had not come so long as He was Himself on earth; it was necessary that He should

[1] Mark ii. 5, reading with B ἀφίενται: the present represents forgiveness as a process already begun, but continuous and progressive; the more usual ἀφέωνται depicts it as complete and abiding.

[2] Nathan's absolution of David (2 Sam. xii. 13) is an isolated act, not implying any general commission to absolve.

[3] ἐξουσίαν ἔχει ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. Cf. John v. 27.

[4] Luke vii. 47 f.

[5] *e.g.* Luke xxiii. 43; John v. 14, viii. 11, ix. 35 ff.

die and rise from the dead and ascend to the Father and send the Holy Spirit to the Church before the ministry of absolution could become general. It is by His Spirit in the Church that our Lord normally forgives sin. Nevertheless the source of absolving power resides in the Son of Man Himself: the Church absolves only by His authority, and as His Body.

This is the most important of the contributions which the New Testament makes to the doctrine of Forgiveness. The forgiveness of sins, already promised in the Old Testament, is connected by the New Testament with the person of Christ; it comes through, and only through, the Son of Man. A second point which the Gospels emphasize is that forgiveness can be realized only by those who can themselves forgive. Our Lord made so much of this condition that He embodied it in the daily prayer which He gave to the Church, adding: "if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."[1] The reason for His insistence on this condition is given in the parable of the unmerciful servant: "shouldest not thou also have had mercy on thy fellow-servant, even as I had mercy on thee"?[2] He is not worthy to be a recipient of the Divine

[1] Matt. vi. 14 f. [2] Matt. xviii. 21 ff.

mercy, who shews no mercy to his brother-man. Forgiveness on God's part is possible only when He sees in the sinner the rudiments of a character such as His own; the nature that cannot forgive is not capable of receiving forgiveness.

In a few sayings toward the end of His life the Lord spoke of a relation between God's forgiveness of man's sin and His own approaching sacrifice. "The Son of Man," He said, "came to give his life a ransom (*λύτρον*) for many."[1] The words intimate at least that the death of Jesus would be equivalent to the death of many—that many would live because He died. So He spoke on His way to the Cross; and at the Last Supper, when He gave the Bread and the Cup to His disciples, He is reported to have said of the Bread, "This is My body which is being given for you,"[2] and of the Cup, "This is My blood of the Covenant, which is being shed for many unto remission of sins."[3] The words "unto remission of sins" occur here only in St Matthew, and are perhaps interpretative; but if so, they are a true

[1] Mark x. 45. On *λύτρον* see Dr McNeile's full note (Matt. xx. 28). In the LXX the word is consistently used to denote an equivalent. The N.T. has it only in this saying, but cf. *ἀντίλυτρον* (1 Tim. ii. 6).

[2] Luke xxii. 19, 1 Cor. xi. 24.

[3] Matt. xxvi. 28 *τοῦτο γάρ ἐστιν τὸ αἷμά μου τῆς διαθήκης τὸ περὶ πολλῶν ἐκχυννόμενον εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν* (Mark, *τοῦτο . . . τὸ ἐκχυννόμενον ὑπὲρ πολλῶν*; Luke, 1 Cor. *τοῦτο τὸ ποτήριον ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη [ἐστὶν] ἐν τῷ αἵματι μου* (or *ἐν τῷ ἐμῷ αἵματι*). *Τὸ αἷμα τῆς διαθήκης* clearly refers to Exod. xxiv. 8.

gloss upon the words "of the Covenant," which are also in St Mark; for the remission of sins is one of the great gifts of the New Covenant[1] which was sealed with the Blood of Christ. Lastly, St Luke relates[2] that on the eve of the Ascension our Lord concluded an exposition of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah with the words, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer, and rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name[3] unto all the nations." The preaching of repentance and remission was by no means a new departure, yet in two respects the preaching of the Apostles was on new lines: (1) the call to repentance and the offer of forgiveness, hitherto limited to Israel, were now extended to all nations, and (2) the whole was based on the Name of Jesus Christ, *i.e.* on the ground of all that His Name stands for—all that He is and has done. In future the hope of pardon rests not upon the general truth that God is merciful, but on the particular manifestation of His mercy made in the Incarnation and Atonement. Not only has the Son of Man received power to absolve, but all God's acts of mercy are mediated through Him. St Peter

[1] Cf. Jerem. xxxi. 31-34, quoted in Heb. viii. 8-12.

[2] Luke xxiv. 46.

[3] ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ, on the basis of His person, character, and work.

rightly interpreted the terms of his commission when he declared before the Sanhedrin that "in none other is there salvation; for neither is there any other name under heaven that is given among men wherein we must be saved."[1]

The fourth Gospel makes some important contributions to the Christian doctrine of Forgiveness. The witness of the Baptist to Jesus (i. 29), "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world," has made a deep impression on the thought, the art, and the liturgical language of Christendom. The Lamb and the taking away of sin[2] are Old Testament images; but the application of these terms to Jesus Christ and the extension of His atonement to the world belong to the new dispensation, and on the lips of the Forerunner are highly significant. The same note is struck by the Evangelist[3] in chapter iii. 16: "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life." Here faith in Christ is the condition of salvation, and no mention is made of repentance, which is implied in faith; and this is another characteristic of the fourth

[1] Acts iv. 12.

[2] Isa. liii. 7 ὁ ἀμνὸς τοῦ θεοῦ reminds us of Gen. xxii. 8: ὁ θεὸς ὄψεται ἑαυτῷ πρόβασον εἰς ὁλοκάρπωσιν. For αἴρειν, to take away (sin), see 1 Sam. xv. 25 ἆρον δὴ τὸ ἁμάρτημά μου; xxv. 28 ἆρον δὴ τὸ ἀνόμημα.

[3] The passage, iii. 16-21, probably "contains the reflections of the Evangelist, and is not a continuation of the words of the Lord" (Westcott, *ad loc.*).

Gospel.[1] The new emphasis laid on faith answers to the new basis of salvation which the Gospel has laid; as repentance leads men back to God, so faith lays hold on the person and work of the Redeemer, the only ground upon which the hope of forgiveness can be securely built.

It is to St John also that we owe our knowledge of the commission which the Risen Christ gave to His Church on the evening of the first Easter Day.[2] "He breathed on them (*i.e.* on the Apostles and other disciples assembled in the upper room) and saith unto them: Receive ye the Holy Spirit: whose soever sins ye remit, they have been remitted unto them; whose soever sins ye retain, they have been retained."[3] Thus the Lord, His own ministry ended and His atoning sacrifice consummated by the Resurrection, entrusted to His Church, represented by the gathering in the upper room, the authority to forgive sins which He had received from the Father. As He was Himself sent by the Father, so He, in His turn, sent them; what He had done by the authority of the Father, the Church was henceforth to do in His Name, and for this end He gave her special gifts of the Holy Spirit. How this amazing

[1] On St John's use of *πιστεύειν* see E. A. Abbott, *Johannine Vocabulary*, p. 19 ff. The noun *πίστις* does not appear in the fourth Gospel.

[2] John xx. 21 ff.

[3] Cf. Luke xxiv. 33 *εὗρον ἠθροισμένους τοὺς ἕνδεκα καὶ τοὺς σὺν αὐτοῖς.*

power was intended to be used, and how it has actually been used by the Apostolic Church, we must consider further on; for the present it is enough to note the greatness of the gift which crowned the earthly work of the Incarnate Son and is the basis of the whole ministry of reconciliation, as it has been carried forward through the centuries and exists among us to this day.

From the Gospels we turn to the Acts and Epistles to learn how the Paraclete in the Church interpreted and developed the teaching of the Lord on the subject of Forgiveness. A beginning was made on the Day of Pentecost. When the crowd who were keeping the feast at Jerusalem, convicted by the Spirit of the sin of having crucified the Messiah, demanded of Peter and the rest, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" St Peter was ready with the answer: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."[1] It may have seemed to many of the disciples of John who were present as if the Apostle were merely repeating the appeal of the Baptist, for he too had preached a baptism of repentance unto the remission of sins. But the baptism which Peter pressed upon the multitude at the Pentecost was more than a profession of penitence. It was ministered in the Name of Jesus

[1] Acts ii. 38.

Christ, and implied faith in His Messiahship; it brought the gift of the Spirit of Christ; it cancelled all past sins, even the sin of having rejected and crucified the Lord. "Arise and be baptized," was the message of Ananias to the converted persecutor Saul, "and wash away thy sins, calling on the Name of the Lord."[1] Even the sin of persecuting the Christ in the person of His followers could be washed away in the waters of Christ's baptism. Yet that Christian baptism was no magical rite, bestowing forgiveness of sins where repentance and faith were wanting, was clearly shewn in the case of Simon the Sorcerer, who shortly after his baptism was pronounced by St Peter to have "neither part nor lot in this matter," since his heart was "not right before God";—to be, on the contrary, "in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity."[2] Simon had brought to baptism an impenitent heart, and therefore went from the font unforgiven. All past sins are remitted in Baptism, but on the condition of repentance and faith.

St Paul, while the memories of his own conversion and baptism were yet fresh, was sent forth to the Gentile world to turn men "from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God," that they also might "receive remission of sins."[3] We

[1] Acts xxii. 16. [2] Acts viii. 13, 21 ff.

[3] Acts xxvi. 17 f. The words probably sum up the impressions left upon the mind of Saul by his vision and the events that followed it.

learn from the Acts how he delivered this message during his first missionary journey. "Be it known unto you, brethren," he preached in the synagogue of the Pisidian Antioch, "that through this man [Jesus] is proclaimed unto you the remission of sins, and by him everyone that believeth is justified from all things from which ye could not be justified by the Law of Moses."[1] The words are significant as presenting at this early stage in his career the Apostle's characteristic view of the relation in which the forgiven stand to God. He says that everyone who believes is being justified (*δικαιοῦται*).[2] When we turn to the Epistles in which this idea is worked out, we are met by the significant fact that the words 'forgive' and 'forgiveness' are rarely used,[3] their place being taken

[1] Acts xiii. 38 f. There seems to be no reason for doubting that St Luke is here representing the substance of St Paul's speech. Cf. Prof. P. Gardner in *Cambridge Biblical Essays*, p. 398: "Certainly the matter of the speech is eminently Pauline, and the manner, apart from the mere choice of words, is also Pauline." The words themselves, too, at least in the leading phrases, are eminently Pauline, *e.g.* *ὁ πιστεύων δικαιοῦται*. There is no improbability in supposing that the phrase, as well as the doctrine, was already seething in the Apostle's mind as early as the year 48.

[2] *δικαιοῦσθαι*, *δικαίωσις* (O.L. *iustificare*, *iustificatio*, already in Tertullian). On *δικαιοῦν* as a forensic term, see the careful discussion in Sanday and Headlam, *Romans*, p. 30 f.

[3] In the Pauline Epistles *ἄφεσις* occurs only twice (Eph. i. 7, Col. i. 14), and *ἀφιέναι* is used only in a quotation from the Old Testament (Rom. iv. 7); the synonym *χαρίζεσθαι* twice takes the place of *ἀφιέναι* (Eph. iv. 32, Col. ii. 13).

by 'justify' and 'justification.' This change of terms cannot be accidental, and still less can it be due to any indifference to the great Christian doctrine of the Remission of Sins. St Paul drops the usual words because he has found words of larger meaning. Justification includes remission and something more; God not only forgives sinners who believe in His Son Jesus Christ, but pronounces them righteous; He foresees all that their faith will do for them and acquits them. The final judgement is anticipated at the beginning of the new life; the believer starts on his way free from guilt; he is "in Christ,"[1] the Righteous, into whose Body his baptism has admitted him. "Ye were washed," St Paul writes to the Church at Corinth, which was far indeed from the perfection of the Christian character, "ye were sanctified, ye were justified."[2] The past tense, recovered in our revised version, is essential to the right understanding of St Paul's position. The baptized believer is more than forgiven; at a definite moment, which came when he was washed in baptism, he was potentially sanctified and justified, and in that condition he remains in the sight of God so long as he abides in union with Christ.

There are several points here which need to be

[1] On ἐν Χριστῷ see J. A. Robinson, *Ephesians*, p. 22 ff.

[2] 1 Cor. vi. 11 ἀπελαύσασθε ... ἡγιάσθητε ... ἐδικαιώθητε—all aorists.

examined in detail. (1) St Paul's doctrine of justification rests upon his conception of the two Adams. If it be asked how God can justify the ungodly, seeing that He "will not clear the guilty," and cannot ignore facts, the Apostle answers that the believer is not justified by what he is in himself but by what he is in Christ. As all men sinned in the first Adam, so all believers obeyed in the second. The second Adam is the source of justification to all who are spiritually identified with Him, as the first brought condemnation to all who derive from him their natural life.[1] Those who are Christ's are "made the righteousness of God in him."[2] Their faith identifies them with Him, and His obedience is theirs. (2) The faith which justifies also sanctifies; it is the germ of the new life which makes for righteousness. St Paul's doctrine of justification cannot be divorced from his doctrine of sanctification. He does not ever confuse the two processes; to justify is always to account, regard, treat as righteous, and not to impart righteousness, which is the work of sanctification. But the life of justification and the life of sanctification begin simultaneously, and proceed from the same source; and they flow on in

[1] Rom. v. 18 ff.

[2] 2 Cor. v. 21: "It is in Christ, *i.e.* through our union with Him... and not in our own right, that we become righteous in God's sight" (A. Plummer, *ad loc.*).

parallel streams till they meet in the ocean of the life everlasting. (3) If St Paul had been asked to say at what moment in the individual life forgiveness, justification, and the new life in Christ began, he would surely have answered, 'At Baptism.' "Are ye ignorant," he asks the Romans in the chapter which immediately follows his treatment of justification, "that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?" "We were buried therefore with him through baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also should walk in newness of life."[1] "Ye are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus" (so he writes to the Galatians), "for as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ"[2]; and to the Colossians, "Buried with him in baptism, wherein ye were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead."[3] Lastly, in the Pastorals we are taught that "according to his mercy he saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost... that being justified by his grace we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life."[4] It is plain to see how the whole system of St Paul's soteriology hangs together, and is essentially one with

[1] Rom. vi. 3 f.
[2] Gal. iii. 27.
[3] Col. ii. 12.
[4] Titus iii. 5 ff.

the original preaching of repentance and remission of sin. The primitive convert who was brought to repentance and faith by the preaching of the word, sought admission by baptism into the Body of Christ. In that act of faith he washed away his past sin; he put on Christ and was justified by union with the Righteous One; he was born into a new life by receiving the Spirit of Christ. There is no contradiction between St Paul's doctrine of justification by faith and the doctrine, also taught by him, of baptismal regeneration and sacramental grace. They form complementary parts of a connected scheme in which the Apostle has enshrined the central fact of the Forgiveness of Sins.

St Paul's chief interest lies in the Christian life—its origin, its course, its consummation; the life of the individual Christian, and the life of the Christian society, the Church. But he does not forget the great historical foundation on which this life is based. No New Testament writer insists more strongly on the Death and the Resurrection of Jesus Christ as the ground which supports the whole edifice. We are justified, he says, "through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth to be a propitiation through faith by his blood."[1] "He was delivered up for our trespasses, and was raised for our justifica-

[1] Rom. iii. 24 f.

tion."[1] "Being justified by his blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through him; for if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, shall we be saved by his life."[2] "God was, in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself." "Him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf."[3] Only at one point does St Paul's view of the Atonement seem to lack completeness. It is rare to find in his writings any reference to the Levitical system of sacrifice as typical of the offering of Christ;[4] of our Lord as the High Priest who offered Himself for the sins of men he says nothing. From the Apostle's point of view our Lord is the Mediator, the Redeemer, the Reconciler, the Saviour[5] rather than the Priest; and His death is the act of reconciliation, the consummation of a lifelong obedience, the supreme manifestation of His love,[6] rather than a sacrifice offered to God. But what is thus wanting in the Pauline Epistles has been abundantly supplied by the anonymous writer to the Hebrews. In Hebrews the high-priestly office of Christ is

[1] Rom. iv. 25. [2] Rom. v. 9 f. [3] 2 Cor. v. 21.

[4] Rom. iii. 25 (*ὃν προέθετο ὁ θεὸς ἱλαστήριον*) and Eph. v. 2 (*παρέδωκεν ἑαυτὸν ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν προσφορὰν καὶ θυσίαν τῷ θεῷ εἰς ὀσμὴν εὐωδίας*) stand almost alone in this respect. The fact is the more remarkable because St Paul frequently uses sacrificial terms with reference to the Christian life; see *e.g.* Rom. xii. 1, xv. 16; Phil. ii. 17, iv. 18.

[5] Cf. 1 Tim. ii. 5; 1 Cor. i. 30; 2 Cor. v. 18 ff.; Phil. iii. 20.

[6] Cf. Rom. v. 10; Phil. ii. 8; Gal. ii. 20.

paramount. The Cross appears as the altar of which Christians alone have the right to eat. By His death upon it He made both propitiation and purification for the sins of His people. On it He offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, an offering that is never to be repeated, since under the New Covenant[1] God will remember no more the sins of the forgiven. But the writer of Hebrews does not stop at the Cross, as if it were the final service rendered to the world by the great High Priest. He follows the High Priest into heaven itself, and sees Him still working out there the salvation of His people.[2] He finds an analogy in the ritual of the Levitical law. On the yearly Day of Atonement the Jewish High Priest, after he had offered sacrifices in the outer court, passed into the innermost sanctuary with the blood of the victims, and there made atonement for the sins of Israel.[3] So Christ through His own blood entered at the Ascension into heaven itself, there to appear in the presence of God on our behalf, to carry on His priestly work of representation and intercession until the end of time. Then the veil will be drawn aside, and the High Priest of the Israel of God will be seen coming forth to announce to His waiting people the completion of His atoning work. "Christ, having been once

[1] Heb. xiii. 10, i. 3, ii. 17, x. 12 ff.

[2] Heb. viii. 1 ff.

[3] Lev. xvi. 1 ff.

offered to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time, apart from sin, to them that wait for him, unto salvation."[1]

The Church, then, looks for her final absolution at the second Advent of the Lord. But meanwhile the Blood of Christ, the righteous Life sacrificed for our redemption, cleanses the conscience of believers from the pollution of unforgiven sin, and His entrance on their behalf into heaven gives them access to the presence of God.[2] Yet the sense of freedom from guilt and of liberty to approach God in prayer and holy fellowship is no guarantee of final salvation. The forgiven may fall, and fall finally. No Epistle is more severe in its judgement of Christians who sin wilfully after baptism than the "Epistle of Priesthood"[3]: if they fall away, this writer teaches, "it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance"; "if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more a sacrifice for sins."[4] It is apparently of apostasy or of gross immorality that the writer is thinking; but his words are a wholesome warning to any who abuse the grace of God.

Of the other non-Pauline Epistles there is less to be said. St James[5] points out a way in which the

[1] Heb. ix. 11 f., 24-28. [2] Heb. ix. 14, x. 19 ff.

[3] I borrow the title from Canon Nairne's *Studies in the Epistle to the Hebrews*.

[4] Heb. vi. 4-6, x. 26 ff. [5] James v. 14 ff.

forgiveness of sins committed after baptism may be gained. When a member of the Church is overtaken by sickness, he is directed to send for the presbyters of the local church, that they may pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord, and "the prayer of faith shall save him that is sick, . . . and if he have committed sins, it shall be forgiven him." "Confess, therefore,[1] your sins one to another (St James proceeds) and pray one for another, that ye may be healed." There are several interesting points in this little glimpse into primitive Church life—the summoning to the sick man's bedside of the whole presbytery, the use of unction as a means of healing, but especially, in connexion with the present subject, the mutual confession of sins which is recommended both to the sick and the whole. In the case of the sick man the confession seems to be made to the college of presbyters, but the principle is affirmed that for all Christians mutual confession of sins is desirable in order to gain the benefits of mutual intercession. Of absolution, apart from the healing power of intercession, there is, however, as

[1] The sequence of thought expressed by οὖν is not very clear. Mayor paraphrases: "Since prayer has such power, pray for each other, and that you may be able to do this better, confess your faults to each other" (*St James*, p. 163). Or the connexion may be: "The sick man receives forgiveness for the sins which he confesses to the presbyters (for such confession is of course implied); all of you, then, sick or whole, confess your sins to one another, and you also shall receive healing, physical or spiritual, as the case may be."

yet no word. And the confession which St James counsels his readers to use is, of course, of a quite informal kind and a voluntary act, a natural outcome of the spirit of brotherhood which was characteristic of primitive Christianity.

The Petrine Epistles have little to say about the remission of sins, dealing chiefly with the new life which accompanies the gift of pardon and is its proper fruit. Thus in 1 Peter i. 2 "sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ"[1] is coupled with "obedience," and later on in the Epistle Christ is said to have borne our sins to the intent "that we, having died unto sins, might live unto righteousness."[2] In the same spirit the second Epistle which bears St Peter's name charges Christians who are idle or unfruitful with having forgotten the cleansing from their old sins which they received in baptism:[3] the baptismal remission was of little avail if it were not followed by a life of active service and patient bearing of the fruit of the Spirit. Similarly the Epistle of Jude reminds believers that a whole generation of Israel, after being saved from the land of Egypt, fell in the wilderness, and urges them to keep themselves in the love of God, so that they may with good reason

[1] See Dr Hort's full note on *ῥαντισμὸς αἵματος* (p. 22 ff.).

[2] 1 Pet. ii. 24.

[3] 2 Pet. i. 9 *λήθην λαβὼν τοῦ καθαρισμοῦ τῶν πάλαι αὐτοῦ ἁμαρτιῶν.* Mayor quotes among other parallels Hermas, *mand.* 4. 3, *εἰς ὕδωρ κατέβημεν καὶ ἐλάβομεν ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν τῶν προτέρων.*

look for the mercy of Christ unto eternal life.[1] Forgiveness, it is implied, is conditional so long as we are here; not until the Lord returns and pronounces the final absolution is that good gift of God beyond recall.

The first Epistle of St John throws important light on the forgiveness of the sins of Christians. The writer assumes that all Christians have received forgiveness at the very beginning of their course: "I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake."[2] But they deceive themselves if they say either that they have no sin or that they have not sinned; the forgiven may and do fall into sin. But "if any man sin," what then? Is his case hopeless? Nay, "if we confess our sins, he (God) is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." "We (Christians) have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous; and he is the Propitiation for our sins."[3] St John points the Christian who confesses his sin, not to Christ upon the Cross, but to Christ at the right hand of God: not to a dying or dead Redeemer, but to a living Advocate, an unexhausted and inexhaustible Propitiation.[4] His position is practically the same that is taken, as we have seen, by the writer to the Hebrews. The

[1] Jude 5, 21.

[2] 1 John ii. 12.

[3] 1 John i. 9–ii. 2.

[4] αὐτὸς ἱλασμός ἐστιν, not ἦν.

Sacrifice once offered is still effective in the hands of the living Lord. In Hebrews He is seen as the High Priest in the Holy of Holies, making atonement with His blood; in St John's Epistle He is the Advocate in the court of Heaven, representing His people and pleading their cause effectually as their Righteous Head. In both writings the thoughts of sinners are turned to the living Christ, who died for the sins of men, but is now alive for evermore to claim for the race forgiveness of all sins that are confessed and forsaken.

The Apocalypse completes the New Testament doctrine of Forgiveness with a glowing picture of the future blessedness of the forgiven, and the glories of Him who has procured their pardon. "Unto him that loveth us"—so the book opens—"and loosed us from our sins by his blood ... to him be the glory and the dominion for ever and ever." "Thou wast slain and didst purchase unto God with thy blood men of every tribe and tongue and people and nation." "Worthy is the Lamb that hath been slain to receive the power and riches and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing." "I saw, and behold a great multitude which no man could number, out of every nation and of all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the Throne and before the Lamb, arrayed in white robes." "These are they which come out of the great tribulation, and they washed their

robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb; therefore are they before the throne of God, and they serve day and night in his temple, and he that sitteth on the throne shall spread his tabernacle over them; they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun strike upon them nor any heat. For the Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them unto fountains of waters of life, and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes."[1]

So in the last book of the New Testament canon the great Christian doctrine of Forgiveness of Sins works itself out into visions of a sinless and deathless eternity. It is to that end, and to nothing less, that the life of the forgiven is leading them. Through many falls, in spite of many fears and some dark moments of doubt, their steps are being guided to a state in which forgiveness is complete and final—to a world where they will sin no more.

[1] Apoc. i. 5 f.; v. 9, 12; vii. 9 ff.

## CHAPTER V

# SUMMARY OF THE BIBLICAL DOCTRINE

We are now in possession of materials which justify an attempt to construct the outlines of a Biblical doctrine of the Forgiveness of Sins.

1. The Bible supplies no formal definition of Sin. But an approach to definition is made by St John, when in his first Epistle he identifies Sin with lawlessness.[1] To sin is to resist the Will of God as it is declared to us either in a written revelation or in the voice of conscience. Negatively, to sin is to fall short of God's requirements, to miss the mark set before man by his creation in the Divine image. Through sin human life becomes a failure, since it falls short of the glory of God,[2] to which it is the high destiny of man to attain. This failure is universal, except in the case of the Virgin's Son, who, though in all points tempted like as we are, was without sin; not even His bitter enemies were able to convict Him of it.[3]

[1] 1 John iii. 4.
[2] Rom. iii. 23.
[3] Heb. iv. 15; John viii. 46.

Sinlessness is the goal of the Christian life, as it was the glory of the life of Christ; the new nature which is born of God cannot sin. But so long as we are here the new nature is opposed by the flesh, which fights against the Spirit;[1] there is a law or principle in our members which wars against the law of our minds, and brings us into captivity under the law of sin.[2] If it be asked whence came this corruption of a nature which God made in His own likeness, St Paul, following herein contemporary Jewish thought, connects it with the story of the Fall.[3] Adam's sin was the sin of the race; all men sinned in their head and representative, and so sin entered into the world. In this view St Paul stands alone; but the deep-seated inherited corruption of the human heart is taught by our Lord,[4] and indeed is recognized by writers both of the Old and the New Testament. Sin is a disease which has infected the whole race; a disease which ends in death, since it alienates from God who is the true life of man. Or, to look at the matter from another point of view, sin involves guilt; it deserves the wrath of God,[5] and renders the sinner liable to His judgement. Not that all sins imply equal guilt or incur the same penalty: some are "unto death" and others "not unto death";[6] for some an excuse may

[1] Gal. v. 17.
[2] Rom. vii. 23.
[3] Rom. v. 12 ff.
[4] Mark vii. 21 ff.
[5] Eph. ii. 3.
[6] 1 John v. 16 f.

be offered, such as ignorance ;[1] others "go before unto judgement," as if they demanded swift retribution.[2] Yet "the wages of Sin," speaking generally, "is death" :[3] the sinner yields at the best "dead works" [4] in the present life, and unless forgiveness intervenes, earns "the second death" [5] in the world to come.

Sins are the concrete expression of Sin, the symptoms of the disease, or the many forms which the disease takes. The disease itself has its seat in the heart, in the centre of man's spiritual being ; out of this source proceed all sinful actions and words as well as sinful thoughts. Our sins are the children of our lusts,[6] *i.e.* our sinful desires ; and any remedy for sin, to be effectual, must eradicate sinful desires, and not merely check or prevent sinful words and actions. An act of Divine forgiveness which removes the guilt of sins must at the same time provide for the destruction of the lusts of which they are conceived and born. The Gospel secures both ends through the Cross. They that are Christ's "have crucified the flesh, with the passions and the lusts thereof."[7] "Our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be done away, that so we should no longer be in bondage to sin."[8]

[1] John xv. 22, 24.
[2] 1 Tim. v. 24.
[3] Rom. vi. 23.
[4] Heb. ix. 14.
[5] Apoc. xxi. 8.
[6] James i. 15.
[7] Gal. v. 24.
[8] Rom. vi. 6.

2. Together with its doctrine of Sin the Bible gradually developes a doctrine of Forgiveness. In the Old Testament sin and the punishment of sin receive fuller treatment than its forgiveness. The Hebrew people, with their comparatively keen sense of the nearness and the holiness of God, were more fully alive than other nations to the fact of sin and to all that the fact involves. Of the punishment of sin also the Old Testament has much to say. With regard to forgiveness it recognizes two things: (1) the presence in the Divine character of qualities of mercy and compassion which move God to forgive where forgiveness is possible;[1] and (2) the necessity for a response on the side of man, an answer of confession, repentance, and amendment of life, if man would win forgiveness from God. There must be on the sinner's part a conscious struggle with evil; the wild beast that lies at the door of the heart must be not only kept out but brought under.[2] The Law provided an atonement for minor offences in sacrifices which removed ceremonial uncleanness, and restored an external fellowship with God in the ordinances of worship; but for sins deliberately committed "with a high hand," presumptuous sins, as the Book of Psalms calls them, no remedy was offered. The Prophets and Psalmists attach but little value to ceremonial purification, and urge repentance and con-

[1] Exod. xxxiv. 6 f. [2] Gen. iv. 7.

fession as the conditions of pardon; on these terms they promise forgiveness to the nation and to the individual Israelite, while the Psalmists describe the experience of the forgiven. But the promise and the experience are both limited to the Chosen People; with the exception of the story of the repentance of Nineveh, there is nothing to suggest that the Divine forgiveness is or would ever be extended to heathen peoples. For these there was, to use St Paul's word, a pretermission (*πάρεσις*),[1] a passing over rather than a remission of sins (*ἄφεσις*). No overwhelming judgements came upon the vices of heathendom which seemed to cry aloud for vengeance. God "in the generations gone by suffered all nations to walk in their own ways"; He "overlooked" those "times of ignorance." But He did not send them offers of forgiveness; there was no message of grace for those among them who repented, if indeed there were such; the acceptable time had not yet come, the day of salvation had not yet dawned upon the Gentile world.

The New Testament takes over the higher teaching of the Old Testament as regards the forgiveness of sins, and the conditions of forgiveness, laying especial stress on the change of mental and spiritual attitude towards God (*μετάνοια*), which the Latins called

[1] Rom. iii. 25. On *πάρεσις* see Trench, *Synonyms*, § xxxiii., and for the teaching of the passage, cf. Acts xiv. 16, xvii. 30.

*paenitentia* and we call repentance,[1] and which is fundamental in any real conversion of a sinner from the error of his way. It adds, moreover, an entirely new condition, to which it attaches the highest importance. With the Baptist's call, "Repent," our Lord in His earliest preaching coupled a second, "Believe in the Gospel";[2] and it soon became apparent that belief in the Gospel meant in fact belief in Himself, as both the proclaimer and the subject of the Good News. He claimed that as the Son of Man He had authority to forgive sins, and in at least two cases He absolved sinners.[3] He represented His death as a ransom for many,[4] and His blood as sealing the New Covenant for the remission of sins.[5] Repentance and remission of sins, He said, were henceforth to be preached in His name to all nations.[6]

In the Acts, Epistles and Apocalypse, under the teaching of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, these scattered outlines are expanded into a Christian doctrine of Forgiveness. The righteous life of the Son of Man is seen to constitute a great act of obedience on behalf of the race, by which the Fall is reversed,[7] while on

[1] *Paenitentia* ('penitance,' 'penance') is a poor substitute for μετάνοια. Lactantius (*div. inst.* iv. 34) proposed *resipiscentia*, which is better, but *paenitentia* had established itself in Christian Latinity from the time of Tertullian, and was not to be displaced.

[2] Mark i. 14.

[3] Mark ii. 10; Luke vii. 18.

[4] Mark x. 45.

[5] Mark xiv. 24; Matt. xxvi. 28.

[6] Luke xxiv. 47.

[7] Rom. v. 18 f.

the part of God it is an act of Reconciliation; "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself."[1] From another point of view the death of the Cross is regarded as the Sin-offering whereby the Lamb of God takes away the sin of the world.[2] The Victim is also the Priest, "the High Priest of our confession"; [3] the great Day of Atonement has begun, and our High Priest, having offered His sacrifice in the outer court of the visible world, has now entered the Holiest for us, and there invisibly carries on His priestly work until He appears again, apart from sin, unto salvation.[4] Meanwhile He is the Advocate of believers with the Father, the everliving Intercessor, who, because He abideth for ever, is "able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God through him"; the Propitiation not for the sins of the faithful only, but for the whole world.[5] Forgiveness is now offered to all through His blood, *i.e.* His sacrifice, and not forgiveness only but justification, acceptance and acquittal in the sight of God, to be crowned at the Parousia with the final absolution, if the forgiven have walked in the light and endure unto the end.

The word which the New Testament usually employs to represent the forgiveness of sins (ἄφεσις) signifies remission rather than pardon. It emphasizes

[1] 2 Cor. v. 18 f. [2] John i. 29.
[3] Heb. iii. 1. [4] Heb. ix. 11 28.
[5] Heb. vii. 24 f.; 1 John ii. 1 f.



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not so much the mercy which forgives, as the release which leaves the forgiven sinner at liberty to serve God. In the New Testament doctrine nothing is more clearly laid down than that God, when He forgives, not only removes the guilt of sin, but sets the soul free from its dominating power. Baptism, the sacrament of the first forgiveness of sins, is also the sacrament of New Birth, bringing to the soul the renewing grace of the Holy Ghost. "If any man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." But if Christ be in us by His Spirit, "the spirit is life, because of righteousness."[1] So argues St Paul in his great epistle on Justification. Christ "bare our sins in his body upon the tree"; but why? That we might simply be relieved from the penalty of sin? No, but "that we, having died to sin, might live unto righteousness."[2] So St Peter writes; and St John has no other construction to put upon the Christian doctrine of Forgiveness: "These things I write unto you that ye may not sin": "whosoever sinneth (*i.e.* deliberately, or as a habit) hath not seen him, neither knoweth him."[3] A forgiveness which left sin in possession of the throne of the heart would not be such as Christ came to bring and the Church was sent to administer.

The Church is the appointed minister of the Divine

[1] Rom. viii. 9 f. [2] 1 Pet. ii. 24.
[3] 1 John ii. 1, iii. 6.

act of Reconciliation. "Who can forgive sins but God only?"—the question by which the Pharisaic scribes sought to rule out our Lord's claim to absolve sinners—can have but one answer. To forgive is God's prerogative, because sin is committed against God. As no man can forgive a wrong done to another man, so *a fortiori* no man can forgive a sin, which is a wrong done to God. But under the Gospel God's acts of forgiveness are not immediate or direct, but mediated through the Son of Man, the Incarnate Son of God. And the Son of Man has, since the Resurrection and Ascension, entrusted His authority to forgive sins to the Church, giving her His Spirit for this end, and declaring that whose soever sins she forgives, they are forgiven. This is not only taught with the utmost clearness in the fourth Gospel,[1] but it is assumed by St Paul, the chief exponent of the Christian doctrine of Forgiveness. "God," he says, "gave unto us the ministry of reconciliation ... we are ambassadors therefore on behalf of Christ."[2] How this ministry, this ambassadorship, is to be exercised the New Testament does not directly say; it is content to affirm the principle. How the Church, guided on the whole, as we believe, by the Holy Spirit, has interpreted and endeavoured to execute her mission, the following chapters will attempt to shew.

[1] John xx. 23. [2] 2 Cor. v. 18, 20.

# II

# THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS IN THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

"OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST . . . HATH LEFT POWER TO HIS CHURCH TO ABSOLVE ALL SINNERS WHO TRULY REPENT AND BELIEVE IN HIM."

*Book of Common Prayer.*

CHAPTER I

# FROM THE APOSTOLIC AGE TO THE LAST PERSECUTION

THERE comes to us from the last years of the first century a moving tale[1]—a tale which, we are assured by an early writer, is as true as it is moving[2]—of the exercise of the ministry of reconciliation by St John of Ephesus. During one of his itinerations in Asia he had committed to the care of a certain bishop a young man of much promise. The bishop accepted the charge, and fulfilled it diligently up to the time of the youth's baptism; after this he relaxed his efforts, thinking that the neophyte was sufficiently protected by the seal of the Lord which he had received. Upon this the young man grew careless, fell into bad company, and went from bad to worse till he became the leader of a gang of brigands that infested the neighbourhood. Afterwards St John, happening to revisit the place,

[1] Clem. Alex. *quis dives*, 42.

[2] ἄκουσον μῦθον οὐ μῦθον ἀλλὰ ὄντα λόγον.

claimed from the bishop the treasure committed to his hands. When he learnt the truth, John called at once for a horse and a guide, and rode straight off into the haunt of the brigands. Taken prisoner by them, he bade them conduct him to their chief. The latter fled as soon as he recognized St John; John, regardless of the infirmities of age, gave him chase, caught him up, and after much entreaty brought him back to the Church—"a notable example of true penitence, a notable illustration of the New Birth, a trophy of a resurrection which all could see."[1]

Christian writers of the generation that followed St John, although not silent upon the subject of forgiveness, speak of it with less confidence and enthusiasm than the writers of the New Testament. It is to be remembered that the Bible of the sub-Apostolic Church was the Old Testament, and the doctrine of Forgiveness in their writings is therefore still to some extent on the level of Old Testament teaching. On two important points, however, Christian tradition has carried these writers a long way further. They have learned to connect the mercy of God with the sacrifice and mediation of Christ, and to extend God's mercy in Christ to the whole world. "Let us gaze upon the blood

[1] διδοὺς μέγα παράδειγμα μετανοίας ἀληθινῆς καὶ μέγα γνώρισμα παλιγγενεσίας, τρόπαιον ἀναστάσεως βλεπομένης. The story is told to encourage penitents: ἵνα ἐπιθαρρήσῃς, οὕτω μετανοήσας ἀληθῶς, ὅτι σοι μένει σωτηρίας ἐλπὶς ἀξιόχρεως.

of Christ," writes Clement of Rome, "and know how precious it is in the Father's sight, inasmuch as it was shed for our salvation, and has brought the grace of repentance to the whole world."[1] The same writer sees in the scarlet thread that Rahab bound in her window, and that saved her household from destruction, a type of the redemption of the world through the blood of the Lord.[2] "Our Lord," Polycarp tells the Philippians, "endured to face death itself for our sins."[3] "Christ," say the members of Polycarp's church at Smyrna in their circular letter to the churches on the martyrdom of their bishop, "suffered for the whole world of those who are in the way of salvation, a spotless Victim for sinners."[4] Similarly the Alexandrian letter which bears the name of Barnabas: "The Lord endured to deliver His flesh to corruption, that we might be purified by the remission of our sins; and this purification is effected by the blood with which He sprinkles us." "Inasmuch as the Lord renewed us by the remission of our sins, He has made us to be another type of humanity, to have the spirit of little children, as if He were forming us anew."[5]

Another feature in the Apostolic doctrine of the Forgiveness of Sins is clearly reproduced in the

[1] Clem. R. 1 *Cor.* 7.
[2] *Ibid.* 12.
[3] Polyc. *Philipp.* 1.
[4] Mart. Polyc. 17.
[5] Barn. 5, 6.

teaching of the next age. It is seen that baptism into Christ carries with it the forgiveness of all sins committed before baptism. Thus Barnabas says: "We go down into the water full of sins and uncleanness, and we come up bearing fruit in our heart";[1] and Hermas, in the *Shepherd*: "We went down into the water and received remission of our former sins."[2] Justin is at pains to explain this doctrine to the heathen: "All," he writes, "who are won by our teaching and who believe it to be true and undertake to live agreeably to it, are instructed by us to beg from God by fasting and prayer the forgiveness of their past sins. Then they are brought by us where there is water, and are born again in like manner as we ourselves were." "That we may obtain forgiveness of our past sins in the water, the Name of the Father of all is named over him who desires to be born anew, and has repented of his sins; and he is bathed also in the Name of Jesus Christ, and in the Name of the Holy Spirit."[3]

One anonymous[4] writer, who probably belongs to the second half of the second century, shews himself able fully to appreciate the Pauline doctrines of the Atonement and the justification of believers by faith in Jesus Christ. "Such (so we read in the

[1] Barn. 11.

[2] Herm. *mand.* 4. 3.

[3] Justin, *apol.* i. 61.

[4] The author of the *Ep. ad Diognetum* (§ 9).

Epistle to Diognetus) was the surpassing kindness and love of God that He hated us not nor rejected us, nor felt any ill-will towards us, but bore with us in long suffering, and in pity took our sins upon Himself, giving His own Son as a ransom for us, the Holy One for the lawless, the Innocent for the guilty, the Just for the unjust.... For what else could cover our sin but His righteousness? By what means was it possible for us, who were lawless and ungodly, to be justified except in the Son of God alone? O sweet exchange! O creation whose mysteries none can explore! O benefits passing all that we could look for! that the lawlessness of many should be hidden in the one Righteous Man, and the righteousness of One should make many who were lawless righteous." It is hardly surprising that a fragment of early Christian literature so thoroughly imbued with the spirit of St Paul should have fallen under the suspicion of being a forgery of the sixteenth century. But there is no reason to doubt its genuineness, though it stands alone among early post-Apostolic writings in the fulness and clearness of its witness to the teaching of the Epistle to the Romans.

The Church of the second and third centuries concerned itself chiefly with the practical questions arising out of the doctrine of the Remission of Sins. That sins were remitted in baptism all were agreed. But how was remission of sins committed after baptism to

be obtained? The usual answer is, By repentance. Thus the early Christian preacher, whose sermon has been preserved under the name of Clement of Rome, exhorts: "While we are in the world, let us repent, for after we have departed out of the world, we can no more make confession nor repent." "Let us wipe off from us our former sins, repent from the heart, and be saved; while we have time, let us turn to God who called us."[1] As an essential factor in true repentance, confession of sins is urged again and again. Thus Clement says: "It is good for a man to make confession of his sins rather than to harden his heart;"[2] and Barnabas, "Thou shalt confess thy sins; thou shalt not betake thyself to prayer with an evil conscience."[3] The earlier writers of this period seem to contemplate direct confession to God. But the confession might be, and perhaps usually was, made in the congregation, especially before the Eucharist; so the *Didache* teaches: "In church thou shalt confess thy trespasses.... Before ye celebrate the Eucharist, confess your trespasses, that your sacrifice may be pure."[4] With confession the Church of the sub-Apostolic age coupled charity: "We were blessed," Clement says, "if we kept the commandments of God in the harmony of love, that our sins through love might be forgiven."[5] Prayer, of course, accom-

[1] Clem. R. 2 *Cor.* 8, 13, 16. [2] Clem. R. 1 *Cor.* 51.
[3] Barn. 19. [4] *Didache*, 4. [5] Clem. R. 1 *Cor.* 50.

panied confession: "Let us entreat that all our falls and sins may be forgiven."[1] The primitive preacher under the name of Clement is disposed to attach even more importance to fasting and almsgiving: "Fasting is better than prayer, but almsgiving than both . . . almsgiving lifteth off the burden of sins." Yet he is careful to insist on a repentance which is heart-deep: "Repent," he exhorts, "with your whole heart, and so give yourselves salvation and life."[2]

There is a remarkable absence thus far of any reference to the absolving power vested by Christ in the Church. We hear of repentance and of confession of post-baptismal sins, but not as yet of a remission of such sins by any act of the Christian society or its ministers. Yet there are indications that in the case of great and open sins the need was felt of some such use of the ministry of reconciliation, and certain heretical bodies seem to have anticipated the Church in irregular efforts to supply it. Thus the Marcosians appear to have offered in such cases a second baptism under another name, and the Elchasaites rebaptized persons who had been guilty of gross sins.[3] Meanwhile Catholic Christians were considering the whole question of post-baptismal sin, and how it was to be dealt with, especially when the sin was flagrant or scandalous.

[1] Clem. R. 1 *Cor.* 51. [2] Clem. R. 2 *Cor.* 16, 19.

[3] Hippol. *phil.* vi. 41. ix. 15. (I owe these references to Dr. Mayor's *Jude and 2 Peter*, p. 97.)

The problem comes under discussion in *The Shepherd* of Hermas, a Roman work of somewhat uncertain date, but earlier than the middle of the second century.[1] The writer of this allegory represents himself as receiving instruction, first from an aged woman who stands for the Church, and afterwards from the Angel of Penitence, who appears in the guise of a Shepherd. Hermas, who is a Christian, has been charged with harbouring a sinful thought. For the baptized, he is told, the mere desire to commit a sinful act is sin. A sin in a Christian may be repented of and forgiven, but it cannot be repeated with impunity. While the heathen may repent as long as life lasts, the Christian's opportunities of penitence are limited. The peril in which Christians who sin involve themselves is illustrated by a vision of a tower in building; the ground around it is strewn with stones which the builders have rejected. So long as the building goes on, there is a chance that these rejected stones may be restored to their place in the tower; but if they still lie on the ground when the tower has been built, they will never recover their position. Hermas tells the Shepherd that he had heard certain teachers affirm that no other repentance is accepted save that which precedes baptism. The Shepherd replies that ideally this is true: there ought to be no such thing as a relapse into sin after baptism,

[1] Herm. *vis.* 1 ff., *mand.* 4, *sim.* 3. 18.

and therefore no occasion for post-baptismal repentance or remission; he who has been once forgiven should go and sin no more. Nevertheless, in the mercy of God one more opportunity of repentance is allowed, and the Church may receive again those who avail themselves of it. But the indulgence is not to be claimed more than once; if the restored Christian falls again, repentance is unavailing.

It is doubtless of grave and scandalous sins that Hermas is thinking when he allows but one penitence after baptism; and by 'penitence' in such cases he means a public act of penitence, leading to the penitent's restoration to Church fellowship. We have reached a stage where the disciplinary system of the Church has begun to develope itself, and it was in connexion with this movement that the Christian society began to use its authority to remit and to retain sins.

The rudiments of Church discipline[1] are to be found in the New Testament. St Paul directs the Church at Corinth solemnly to deliver over to Satan (*i.e.* to exclude from the fellowship of believers) a member of the body who had been guilty of flagrant immorality; and some years afterwards St Paul himself excommunicated two renegade Christians at Ephesus.[2] On the other hand we find him making provision for the restoration of an offender who, it may be presumed, was penitent.[3] The sub-Apostolic period sup-

[1] 1 Cor. v. 3 ff. [2] 1 Tim. i. 20. [3] 2 Cor. ii. 5 ff.

plies other instances of Church discipline; thus the letter of Clement to the Corinthians who had rebelled against their presbyters bids them submit themselves and receive chastisement unto repentance, bending the knees of the heart.[1] The Philippian Christians are desired by Polycarp to restore frail and erring members to whom the Lord had granted repentance.[2] A little later, in the time of Hadrian, the heretic Cerdon made a practice of confessing his error from time to time before the Roman congregation and afterwards returning to his evil way, until the patience of the Church was exhausted and the duplicity of the penitent was exposed, upon which he withdrew from the assemblies of the brethren.[3] Marcion, Cerdon's successor, who (if we may believe Epiphanius)[4] had been refused admission to penitence by his own father, who was bishop of Sinope, sought in vain to be received into the communion of the Roman Church. Irenaeus tells us that in Asia many of the female disciples of the Valentinian Marcus publicly confessed before the Church that their relations with their teacher had been immoral, and one of them spent the rest of her life in penitence.[5] Some churches indeed seem to have carried severity too far, and

[1] Clem. R. 1 *Cor.* 57.—For fuller particulars, see *Journal of Theological Studies*, iv. p. 321 ff.

[2] Polyc. *Philipp.* 11.

[3] Iren. *haer.* 4. 3.

[4] Epiph. *haer.* xliii. 4 f.

[5] Iren. *haer.* i. 13. 5.

the great Dionysius of Corinth (*c.* 170) in a letter to a Paphlagonian colleague urges that persons who wished to return to the Church from heresy, or who had repented of some immoral act into which they had been betrayed, should be welcomed back to communion.[1]

These examples shew that before the end of the second century there already existed both in the East and West machinery for giving effect to penitential discipline. Already a serious lapse on the part of a baptized Christian was visited by suspension from communion; a season of penitence (*μετάνοια*) was prescribed to the offender by the bishop: public confession (*exomologesis*) was made of the sin before the Church; and not until this had been done could the penitent be readmitted to the society of the faithful. But these disciplinary rules had not yet hardened into a system. It is at Carthage in the early years of the third century that we first encounter a definite system of ecclesiastical discipline, and it is the strong but somewhat rigid mind of Tertullian which has given us a description of its working.

In his book *On Penitence*, a work of his catholic days, written within a year or two of A.D. 200,[2] Tertullian, like Hermas, recognizes at the outset that sins of the spirit call for repentance not less than

[1] Euseb. *H.E.* iv. 23.

[2] See Harnack, *Chronologie*, ii. p. 271 f.

sins of the flesh ; adding that, since our actions have their origin in the will, sins of the spirit may incur even more guilt and deserve a heavier judgement than evil deeds. Repentance and forgiveness are necessary for all, and by the mercy of God are applicable to all sins, whether of will or deed.[1] Forgiveness is conveyed in baptism on the understanding that the candidate has repented of the sins of his past life. We are baptized, not in order that we may cease from sinning, but because we have ceased. The baptized ought to sin no more—to need no second repentance, no further remission.[2] But if he sins after baptism the door still stands open, not wide open as before, but ajar ; and within, in the vestibule, there stands a Second Penitence, which opens to those who knock.[3] This Second Penitence is the last ; it is the plank to which the shipwrecked soul must cling if it would be saved from drowning. And it must needs be harder and more exacting than the first ; the *exomologesis* must be accompanied by humiliating circumstances. The penitent must lie in sackcloth and ashes, partake of no pleasant food or drink ; throw himself at the feet of the presbyters, kneel before the faithful and implore their prayers. It is not surprising that members of the great Church of Carthage were reluctant to submit to such discipline, or that Tertullian found it necessary to urge it upon

[1] Tertull. *de paenit.* 4. [2] *Ibid.* 5, 7. [3] *Ibid.* 7.

penitents by every argument that his ingenuity could suggest. This terrible ordeal was not to be undergone (he says) in the presence of a jeering or amused crowd, but before fellow-Christians, fellow-servants of the same Lord, moved by the same Spirit, who would share the grief and shame of the penitent. And the effects of such a penitence would be of the best; it would extinguish the fires of hell; it would heal the wounds of the soul.[1]

Whether the *exomologesis* was made equally difficult in other churches at this time we do not know. At Alexandria, Clement, the head of the catechetical school, and a contemporary of Tertullian, taught the doctrine of a 'second penitence' in terms very similar to those used by Tertullian, but he does not describe the process.[2] At Rome, a couple of decades later, there seems to have been some laxity in the re-admission of penitents to Church fellowship. If we may believe Tertullian and Hippolytus (neither of them perhaps a very impartial witness in this matter), the Roman bishop Callistus (219-225) professed himself ready to give absolution for all sins, not excepting adultery and fornication, provided that the offender submitted to discipline. Tertullian, who by this time had become a Montanist, regards this 'edict' (so he calls it) as an encouragement to scandalous sins. The Church, he admits, has unlimited power to absolve.

[1] *Ibid.* 9, 12. [2] Clem. Alex. *strom.* ii. 13, § 56.

but in such cases the power ought not to be exercised. Moreover (he adds) the Church which has received power to absolve is the Church of the Spirit, speaking by the mouth of a spiritual man, not a Church which is only a conclave of bishops.[1] But this, of course, is sheer prejudice; the bishops, when they reconciled a penitent, were the mouthpiece of the Catholic Church, and the Catholic Church could claim, at least equally with the Montanists, to be the Church of the Spirit.

Another and more serious critic of the bishop's powers in absolution was the great Origen, who is herein, as so often, a forerunner of much later opinion. The Apostles, he says, had power to pronounce the forgiveness of sins to those whom God had forgiven. This power is inherited by those who share the inspiration and the priestly character of the Apostles. When it is claimed by the Episcopate, the justice of the claim depends on the characters of the men who make it; if they are not what Peter was, they cannot exercise powers which were given to Peter. Our priests can use the power of the keys only if they are such as Christ builds His Church upon; otherwise their binding and loosing of souls is ineffectual. With regard to confession, Origen admits the value of the relief which it brings to burdened consciences; but he recommends penitents to be

[1] Tertull. *de paenit.* 1; cf. Hippol. *phil.* ix. 12.

careful in their choice of a confessor, and he points out that confession is not the only way of gaining relief; if, however, it be preferred, the penitent should be prepared to take the course recommended by the confessor, though it should involve the humiliation of a public *exomologesis*. As for the rule that only one penitence can be allowed after baptism, Origen draws a distinction between graver sins and the failings of daily life; of the latter men should repent day by day, and no formal penitence is necessary. It seems that in Origen's time it was usual to approach the bishop privately before recourse was had to public *exomologesis*, and that this private confession sufficed when, in the bishop's opinion, there was no cause for the public exposure of the penitent.[1]

In the middle year of the third century an event occurred which gave a great impetus to the exercise of penitential discipline. The Edict of Decius (A.D. 250), which made the profession of Christianity a capital crime, fell on the Church like a thunderclap out of a blue sky. Panic seized the weaker brethren of the Christian communities, and many hastened either to sacrifice at the heathen altars, or to procure false certificates of having sacrificed.[2] When this multitude of lapsed Christians sought to be readmitted to communion, it became necessary

[1] Orig. *comm. in Matt.* t. xii. 14; *hom. in Levit.* xv. 2, ii. 4; *hom. in Psalm.* xxxvii. 1.

[2] See *Dictionnaire d'Archéologie Chrétienne*, s.v. *Dèce.*

to shape a policy which, without shutting the door of hope against any who were truly penitent, should purge the Church of the suspicion of complicity with unfaithfuless to Christ and the truth. At Rome opinion was so sharply divided that the rigorist Novatian was able to effect a serious schism. But at Carthage and Alexandria more moderate counsels prevailed; Christians who had sacrificed (*sacrificati*) were subjected to a life-long penance, and were not admitted to communion till the approach of death; those who had escaped from an overt act of apostasy by an unworthy subterfuge (*libellatici*) made satisfaction in the ordinary way by going through the normal *exomologesis*. In either case absolution was given by imposition of hands administered by the bishop; in extremity a presbyter might give the peace, or, if no presbyter was at hand, the act might be performed by a deacon. In such circumstances, no doubt, the confession was private, or at least was not made in the presence of the congregation. The bishop, or if the bishop were not present, a priest, or if no priest could be found, a deacon, exercised the authority which our Lord left to His Church, and the poor soul which through life had not ceased to repent of its fall departed to the Lord in peace.[1]

[1] Cypr. *ep.* 18 "ut . . . non expectata praesentia nostra apud presbyterum quemcumque praesentem; vel si presbyter repertus non fuerit, et

From Alexandria we get an interesting and touching story of the reconciliation of a dying penitent. It comes from the pen of Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria,[1] who uses it to illustrate his view on the question of readmitting the lapsed to communion in their last extremity. An old man, named Sarapion, had lived for many years a blameless life, but in the persecution had lost courage and 'sacrificed.' He often prayed to be restored to Christian fellowship, but in vain. At length he lay dying, and for some days was unconscious; on recovering consciousness he sent his daughter's little son to the priest; he could not die till he had been reconciled. The priest was ill and could not come, but he sent by the hands of the child a portion of the Eucharist, and the boy moistened it and put it into the old man's mouth, and so he departed in peace. "Is it not clear," asks Dionysius, "that Sarapion was kept alive until he obtained release and his sin was blotted out?"[2] There was in this case no imposition of hands either of bishop, presbyter, or deacon; the absolution of the Church was given by readmission to communion, ministered by a child.

urgens exitus coeperit, apud diaconum quoque exomologesin facere delicti sui possint, ut manu eis in paenitentiam imposita veniant ad Dominium cum pace."

[1] Dionysius, *ep. ad Fab.*, cf. Euseb. *H.E.* vi. 44: see the notes in Feltoe's *Dionysius of Alexandria*, p. 19 ff.

[2] ἆρ' οὐκ ἐναργῶς διετηρήθη καὶ παρέμεινεν, ἕως λυθῇ, καὶ τῆς ἁμαρτίας ἐξαλειφθείσης ἐπὶ πολλοῖς οἷς ἔπραξε καλοῖς ὁμολογηθῆναι δυνηθῇ;

## CHAPTER II

# FROM THE LAST PERSECUTION TO THE DEATH OF GREGORY THE GREAT

AFTER forty years of rest the last and greatest of the persecutions of the Church began (A.D. 303), bringing up again the question of the reconciliation of the lapsed. A large fragment has survived of a treatise on Penitence written in 306 by Peter, bishop of Alexandria,[1] which contains a series of rules for the treatment of such penitents, and from this document we learn how the Church, in the person of one of her greatest bishops, exercised the ministry of reconciliation in these troublous times. A year's penitence is prescribed for those who have fallen through lack of courage, and six months' penitence for those who have escaped suffering by means of false pretences. A difference is made between masters and slaves: the slave who seeks readmission to communion is to be kept waiting for a year, while the free man, as the

[1] The text may be read in Routh, *Reliquiae Sacrae*, v. p. 23 ff., or in Lagarde's *Reliquiae iuris eccl. antiq.* p. 63 ff.

more responsible, is suspended for three years. So this wise and judicial pastoral proceeds, carefully discriminating according to circumstances, and providing for each of the cases which experience had shewn to be likely to arise.

As soon as the great persecution was ended by the Edict of Milan (A.D. 313), the subject of discipline was taken up by a succession of synods.[1] The canons of the synods of Elvira and Arles in the West, of Ancyra and Neo-Caesarea in the East, are largely occupied with the question of the penalties to be exacted from Christians who have fallen into apostasy or immorality. They shew that in the East, or at least in Asia Minor, it had become usual to divide penitents into classes or grades (*βαθμοί*, *stationes*) corresponding with the interior divisions of the basilican churches which had sprung up since the middle of the third century. According to this system penitents in the first stage[2] of penitence stood within the vestibule, where they could hear the Scripture lections and the bishop's sermon, and hence they were known as 'hearers' (*οἱ ἀκροώμενοι*); in the next stage, they entered the nave, but withdrew with the catechumens before the anaphora or more solemn

[1] For an account of these see Hefele, *Councils* (E. tr.), vol. i.

[2] On a supposed preliminary stage (*οἱ προσκλαίοντες*, *lugentes*), see Bright, *Canons*, p. 43. They seem to have been "candidates for penitence" rather than penitents.

part of the Eucharistic service began—'kneelers' they were called (*οἱ γόνυ κλίνοντες, οἱ ὑποπίπτοντες, substrati*), because they prostrated themselves at the prayers while others stood. Lastly, they were numbered among the faithful who stood for the prayers of the Liturgy, and were known as *consistentes* (*οἱ συνιστάμενοι*). In each of these 'stations' considerable periods of time were spent, varying according to the nature of the offence or the severity of the local canons which regulated the penance. Thus the synod of Ancyra (314) requires persons who had sacrificed under compulsion to spend one year among the 'hearers,' three among the 'kneelers,' and two more among the *consistentes*, before they were restored to communion;[1] and the great council of Nicaea (325) in certain cases prescribes three years among the 'hearers' and two among the 'kneelers.'[2] The 'stations' have left their mark upon the liturgy of the Apostolic Constitutions, a work compiled in the neighbourhood of Antioch toward the end of the fourth century, where after the homily the deacon proclaims, "Let none of the hearers or of the non-Christians who are present remain;"[3] and later on, before the *missa fidelium* begins, the 'penitents' (*οἱ ἐν μετανοίᾳ*), who are here the 'kneelers,'

[1] Conc. Ancyr. *can.* 4 (Hefele, i. p. 205).

[2] Conc. Nicaen. *can.* 11 f.; cf. Bright, *op. cit.* p. 41 ff.

[3] *μή τις τῶν ἀκροωμένων· μή τις τῶν ἀπίστων.*

withdraw with the catechumens.[1] But as this liturgy was never, so far as appears, a living rite, and scarcely a trace of these dismissals is found in the forms which were in actual use at a somewhat later date, it may be inferred that "the complete system was perhaps rather ideal than actually realized"; or at all events that if it ever was realized, it had fallen into disuse in the next century. It must be regarded as an attempt to regulate public discipline under the new and difficult conditions which were created by the conversion of the Empire, an attempt both interesting and significant, but which met with no considerable success.[2] This impression is confirmed by the silence of the other Church Orders, which recognize the exercise of penitential discipline, but make no reference to the 'stations.'[3]

An effort which had been made to deal with private confessions was equally unsuccessful.[4] It appears that after the Novatianist trouble the bishops—chiefly, it may be presumed, those of the East—had established in their dioceses the office of

[1] The deacon says: ἀπολύεσθε οἱ ἐν μετανοίᾳ (*i.e.* οἱ γόνυ κλίνοντες: cf. Bright, p. 44). See Brightman, *Liturgies Eastern and Western*, i. pp. 3, 9.

[2] Brightman, *op. cit.* p. 585[a].

[3] Maclean, *Ancient Church Orders*, p. 94.

[4] For the whole history of this experiment compare Socrates, *H.E.* v. 19; Sozomen, *H.E.* vii. 16. The details are given by Hooker, *E.P.* vi. 4. 11 ff.

penitentiary priest (*πρεσβύτερος ὁ ἐπὶ τῆς μετανοίας*); *i.e.* they selected in each diocese a presbyter, to whose hearing they referred members of the Church who were conscious of having committed sins which excluded from communion. The penitentiary, it seems, was empowered not only to hear such confessions, but to give absolution and assign a penance.[1] We learn this from the Greek Church historians, Socrates and Sozomen, who tell us also how the experiment failed. A scandal arose at Constantinople in connexion with a private confession (not, we are informed, through any fault of the penitentiary priest), and upon this the bishop (Nectarius, 381-397) put an end to the office. Unfortunately no substitute for it was found, and the moral effect in the Church of the capital was disastrous; public penance had become in most cases impracticable, and, as Sozomen puts it, every one was left to decide for himself whether he was fit to partake of the Mysteries or not. The historian's comment is instructive: "Thus the ancient discipline and the gravity and care which prevailed under it gradually gave place to indifference and neglect; in former days sins were less numerous or less heinous than they are now, for people were then deterred by the shame of confession and by the sternness of the judges who were appointed

[1] Sozom. *l.c.* *ὁ δὲ πρὸς τὴν ἑκάστου ἁμαρτίαν, ὅτι χρὴ ποιῆσαι ἢ ἐκτίσαι ἐπιτίμιον θείς, ἀπέλυε.*

to deal with this matter."[1] Chrysostom, who followed Nectarius, pressed upon his flock the duty of confessing sin to God, and obtaining pardon directly from Him;[2] but the exhortations of the most eloquent of preachers failed to restore the moral standard which the discipline of the Church had hitherto maintained. What remained in the East of the ancient strictness was almost limited to the monasteries, where the brethren still confessed their sins either to the community or in private to a presbyter, as the case seemed to require.[3]

At Rome and in the West the old order of public penitence had a longer life. Sozomen[4] draws a picture of a Roman *exomologesis* in the early years of the fifth century which does not differ materially from Tertullian's account of a similar scene at Carthage at the beginning of the third. He describes how the penitents stood in the face of the congregation, with downcast eyes like mourners, and when the mass was over threw themselves on the floor of the Church with lamentation and other expressions of woe. Then the bishop, himself in tears, approached them, and he also prostrated himself, and the whole congregation wept. After this the bishop rose, raised the penitents, and prayed for them, and so they

[1] Sozom. *l.c.*

[2] Chrys. *hom. de paenit.* (cited by Hooker, ed. Keble, iii. p. 46).

[3] See W. K. Lowther Clarke, *St Basil the Great*, p. 95 ff.

[4] Sozom. *l.c.*

were dismissed. Each of them on returning to his own home afflicted himself by abstinence from food or from the bath, or by such other penance as might have been assigned to him, and so awaited the time appointed by the bishop for his restoration. When that day came, he was released from his sins, and took his place again with the rest of the laity.

Sozomen's account is confirmed on the whole by Western writers. But it is evident that much exhortation was needed to induce the laity to use public penitence. Pacian, a Spanish bishop of the second half of the fourth century, writes: "He who hides not his sins from his brethren, helped by the tears of the Church, is absolved by Christ."[1] At Milan, about the same time, Ambrose[2] bids the penitent shew his wounds to the Physician; that he refers to the public *exomologesis* is clear, for he adds: "Let Mother Church weep for thee, and wash thy faults with her tears; Christ loves to hear many supplications on behalf of one." Ambrose lets us see, by the way, some of the hindrances which in his time already beset the ministry of public penitence. Some would cut themselves off from the sacraments rather than face the ordeal of appearing before the congregation as penitents, or would put off the evil day until it was too late; others submitted to the discipline, but treated

[1] Pacian. *paraen. ad paenit.* 8 (Migne, *P.L.* xiii. 1086).

[2] Ambros. *de paenit.* ii. 10.

it as a purely formal process which was scarcely suffered to interrupt the round of gaieties in which they lived. Nevertheless the great bishop of Milan clung to the old system of public *exomologesis*, and even shared the primitive feeling that post-baptismal penitence should never be repeated; "as there is but one baptism," he reasons, "so there can be but one penitence before the congregation; there are daily sins, of course, of which we may daily repent, but daily repentance is for lighter sins, public penitence for those that are more grave, and for these a remedy can be sought but once." A greater than Ambrose, his disciple Augustine of Hippo, with his wider experience and keen sense of the evil of sin, follows on the same lines. "For lighter daily sins," Augustine writes,[1] "sins without which it is impossible to live here, the daily prayer of the faithful with its daily mention of our trespasses is sufficient . . . but for graver sins recourse must be had to penitence. Often resort is not made to penitence when it ought to be, because the offender fears to lose the good opinion of his fellow men; and some there are, grievous to say, who despise this gift of God, and refuse to believe that sins are forgiven in the Church, and who continue in this state of mind to the end of life." Elsewhere Augustine illustrates from the Gospel the relation in which the Church's

[1] Aug. *enchir.* 19.

sentence of absolution stands to conversion of heart and life. "What," he asks, "would Lazarus have gained by being let out of the tomb, if the Lord had not said, 'Loose him, and let him go'? So with the penitent. When he repents of his sin, he is already restored to life; when he makes a clean breast of it by confession, he comes out of his tomb. But he is not yet released; for that the Church's absolution is necessary. The Church cannot give new life, which is God's prerogative. But she can loose the man who has been restored to life by Christ, and let him go."[1]

Thus far we have not met in the West with any trace of a system of private confession; the primitive discipline of public penitence seems to have been maintained, though with much difficulty, at Rome and Milan, at Barcelona and Hippo Regius. But when after the death of Augustine we turn again to Rome, now under the leadership of the great Pope Leo I. (440-461), we become aware of a disposition to substitute private confession for public penitence. From a letter addressed to Leo by the bishops of Campania[2] it appears that these prelates had received penitents in private, and afterwards read their confessions before the congregation. Leo very properly exclaims against the breach of faith involved in this attempt to combine the two systems of

[1] Aug. *in Ps.* cii. 2. [2] Leo, *ep.* 136.

private and public penitence. But in rejecting the Campanian compromise the Pope incidentally sanctions the use of private confession, when adopted as a substitute for the public discipline. His tone is apologetic ; he pleads that there are sins which cannot be divulged without personal risk to the offender ; he urges, moreover, that it will often be easier to bring sinners to confession if they are not compelled to confess in public. Further, he maintains that public confession is not absolutely necessary ; it may suffice that the sin be confessed first to God, and then in private to the bishop, who will intercede with God for the pardon of the offender.

Leo's policy may have been justified by the circumstances. The days were evil, and it was evident that worse were coming ; before the death of Leo Rome had been taken by the Goths and sacked by the Vandals, while the dreaded Huns were with difficulty kept at bay. In that age of violence and terror, the forces of evil were let loose, and such restraints as public confession and penance were more than ever necessary to the good estate of the Church. Yet how were the proud descendants of the old Roman aristocracy or the half-Christianized conquerors of the Empire to be brought to a public acknowledgement of their sins and acceptance of the discipline which the Church imposed on penitents? The only possible alternative to a complete abandonment of

discipline was private confession and absolution, and Leo felt himself constrained to sanction this. It may not have been what he desired, but it was all that he could hope to secure.

How soon this policy bore fruit at Rome is evident from an entry in the *Liber Pontificalis* belonging to the time of Pope Simplicius (468-483).[1] The Pope, it appears, directed that the Roman presbyters should take their turn in attending at the churches of St Peter, St Paul, and St Lawrence, for the purpose of administering baptism and penance. This order, issued with the best intentions, doubtless struck another blow at the old system of public penitence, since it offered fresh facilities for private confession and absolution. People cannot be expected to choose the harder of two courses when the easier is made accessible to them under the sanction of the highest authority. To give regular opportunities of private penitence was the sure way to kill the older and sterner system.

Public penitence was now reserved for great and scandalous sins, others being dealt with by the clergy in private. Before the seventh century such public discipline as was retained seems to have been reduced in the West to a Lenten ceremony. The so-called Gelasian and Gregorian Sacramentaries, compilations of the seventh and eighth centuries, contain no ritual

[1] *Lib. pontif.* ed. Duchesne, i. p. 249.

for the reconciliation of penitents beyond certain forms appointed for use on Ash Wednesday and Maundy Thursday.[1] On Ash Wednesday the penitent is admitted to penance, receiving a hair shirt in token of repentance, and certain prayers are said over him, among which stands first in both Sacramentaries the collect which is still said with slight changes on Ash Wednesday in the English Commination ("O Lord, we beseech Thee, mercifully hear our prayers," etc.). The penitent then withdraws and spends his Lent in retirement. On Maundy Thursday he again enters the Church, prostrates himself, and is reconciled by the bishop in a series of prayers for the forgiveness of his sin. The prayers are excellent, and there is no reason to doubt that in cases of genuine repentance the two offices and the solitary life imposed during the interval between them may have been as effectual as a severer discipline. Nevertheless this later 'penitence' is a shrunken attenuated form of the primitive *exomologesis* as it existed at Carthage in the days of Tertullian, and, if we may trust Sozomen, at Rome early in the fifth century. A long and humiliating process of *exomologesis* has been reduced to forty days of comparatively easy discipline, and, as a moral force,

[1] *Gelasian Sacramentary* (ed. Wilson), pp. 15 f., 65 ff.; *Gregorian Sacramentary* (ed. Wilson), pp. 138, 205. Cf. Duchesne, *Christian Worship* (E. tr.)[3], p. 437 ff., where the Gallican and Spanish rites will also be found (p. 441 ff.).

making for purity and vigilance, public penitence has practically ceased in the Western Church. In the next chapter we shall see how the Church of the Middle Age sought to recover the hold over public morals which she had lost through the break-down of the ancient order of penitential discipline.

## CHAPTER III

# FROM GREGORY I. TO AQUINAS

THE mediaeval doctrine of Penitence with the disciplinary system based upon it finds its definite beginnings in the teaching of Pope Gregory the Great (590-604). But Gregory's teaching, while it anticipated the theology of the Middle Age, struck its roots into the past. He inherited the traditions of Latin Christianity which began with Tertullian; to Augustine of Hippo in particular he owed the great outlines of his system, working into them, however, features due to influences which were operative in the last years of the sixth century, but from which the great African father was almost wholly free.[1]

It is characteristic of Gregory's teaching on the subject of sin that he emphasizes the freedom of the human will, and its co-operation with the Divine grace in the elect, and in sinners with the workings of Satan. Wilful sin cannot be forgiven by a just God until it has been wiped out by suffering; sinners

[1] See Dudden, *Gregory the Great*, ii. p. 293 ff.

must therefore either accept punishment in the way of penance, or expect punishment hereafter from God. True penitence, according to Gregory, has three factors: conversion, confession, and compensation. The last of these consists in the payment of the penalty which the sin has deserved. Payment may be made in various ways, as by asceticism, self-discipline, almsgiving, and so forth. Gregory freely admits that the sinner's trust must be placed in the merits of Christ; it is only these that render his efforts to compensate for his sin acceptable to God. Nevertheless compensation must be made; without it the merits of Christ are unavailing. It is assumed that compensation has been preceded by conversion and confession; but the tendency of Gregory's teaching is to lay the emphasis on the third and least spiritual of the three constituents of penitence. Absolution itself is secondary; the prayers and oblations of the priest cannot take away sin unless penance is done, *i.e.* unless the prescribed penalty is paid which will satisfy for the offence.[1]

Attempts had been made before Gregory's time to determine the penance to be imposed on different classes of sins. The Penitential books,[2] which began

[1] Dudden, *op. cit.* ii. 384 ff., 429 ff.; Howorth, *Gregory the Great*, p. 263 ff.

[2] See D.C.B. *Penitential Books*; Hauck, *Realencyklopädie*, s.v. *Bussbücher*.

to appear as early as the fifth century, made it their aim to codify the disciplinary regulations of earlier fathers and councils, and thus to assist the parish priests in the difficult task of apportioning the compensation to be made for each offence. The liability of the penitent was thus easily determined; the sinner might know beforehand how much his sin would cost him if it were confessed or detected: so much criminality, so much to pay. It is difficult to conceive of any system more foreign to the New Testament conception of penitence (*μετάνοια*); unspiritual, and even commercial in character, this apportionment of compensatory penance contrasts sharply with the godly sorrow which worketh repentance unto salvation. Yet in our judgement of the system, it must be borne in mind that in an age so far removed from apostolic models this may have been the best or the only possible method of repressing vice.

Efforts were made in the ninth century to prevent the evasion of the ancient discipline in the case of scandalous sins. Thus we find Hincmar of Rheims, in the middle of the century, issuing a mandate that a notorious sinner who refuses public penitence shall be separated from the congregation until he has submitted.[1] In some places the principle of the stations was revived, penitents passing through several grades or stages before they were re-

[1] Labbe, *conc.* viii. p. 585 f.

conciled. As regards the treatment of the minor lapses of daily life, there was much difference of opinion. In such cases public penitence had never been required, and the alternative of confession to God only and confession before a priest was still freely discussed. Then the second Council of Chalons (813) tells us that "some say sins ought to be confessed to God only, whilst others are of opinion that they should be confessed to the priests"; adding with great frankness that both courses are adopted in Holy Church, and each with great advantage. "Only let us see that we confess our sins to God who is the Absolver of sins, and say with David, 'I acknowledged my sin unto Thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid' ... and also that, as the Apostle directs, we confess our sins one to another, and pray one for another, that we may be healed. So then confession made to God purges away sins, but confession made to the priest shews us in what manner sins are purged. For God, who is the Author and Giver of salvation and health, bestows this gift ofttimes by the invisible working of His power, ofttimes by the instrumentality of physicians."[1]

Thus it was still optional for the ordinary members of the Church whether they would use confession to the priest or not. But there was doubtless a growing tendency on the part of the clergy to encourage

[1] Conc. Cabillon. ii. *can.* 33 (Mansi, *conc.* xiv. 100).

private confession, and on the part of the devout laity to use it. Martene prints [1] a large number of penitential *ordines* set forth in various dioceses to assist priest and penitent in the hearing and making of confessions, some of which belong to the ninth and tenth century. Efforts were made to secure an annual confession on Ash Wednesday; others urged confession thrice in the year. Up to the twelfth century it remained, however, an open question whether confession before a priest was necessary or merely expedient; it was pressed on the laity, but not as yet enforced.

Meanwhile a new theology was springing up in the Western Church, which aimed at exact definition and a precise rule of life. Scholasticism sought to reduce the whole circle of religious thought and action to a system in which room could be found for later speculation and practice by the side of the great Christian verities which had a place in the Catholic faith.

Under this system penitence took its place among the sacraments.[2] In a looser sense it had been called a sacrament by Gregory, and it is so called by Peter Damian and Bernard of Clairvaux in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. But when once the number of the sacraments was fixed at seven, and Penitence

[1] Martene, *De ant. eccl. rit.* i. 7 (tom. ii. p. 41 *sqq.*).

[2] Cf. Harnack, *History of Dogma* (E. tr.), vi. p. 201 ff.

had gained a permanent place among them, it rose in the general estimation to a position inferior only to Baptism and the Eucharist. There was no sacrament which touched the laity so directly, with the exception of the two great sacraments of the Gospel, and in some respects it appealed to them even more strongly. It was held that the Eucharist could not be safely approached except through the gate of penitence; and sacramental Penitence had this advantage over Baptism that whereas a man could be baptized but once, and received that sacrament in unconscious infancy, penitence under the new régime could be repeated as often as it was needed, and belonged to the most vital experiences of adult life.

The time had now come, in the judgement of the Latin Church, for making confession to the priest at stated intervals compulsory. This important step was taken by Pope Innocent III. at the fourth Lateran Council (1215), whose 21st canon runs: "Let every baptized person (*fidelis*) of either sex, when come to years of discretion, sincerely confess his sins alone to his own priest at least once a year, and endeavour to the best of his ability to fulfil the penance imposed upon him, receiving reverently the sacrament of the Eucharist at Easter, unless by his priest's advice for some reasonable cause he shall abstain for a time from such reception; on pain of being prohibited from entering the church during his

lifetime, and upon his death being left without Christian burial." The canon goes on to provide that leave must be obtained from the parish priest by any penitent who desires to confess to another priest; if he fails to do this, the priest who hears his confession shall have no power to absolve him. Lastly, it insists on the seal of confession being kept intact; any priest who betrays his penitent's confidence is to be punished by degradation and confined in a monastery.[1]

Twelve years after the passing of this canon the greatest of mediaeval theologians was born. The birth of Thomas of Aquinum was an opportune event for the Latin Church and its new policy of compulsory confession. A strong Pope such as Innocent could make confession obligatory; but it needed a great theologian to place upon a permanent basis the mediaeval doctrine of penitence, and to justify the policy which had made it obligatory on Western Christendom. Thomas has attempted this task in his *Summa*[2] with such a measure of success that his statement of the doctrine is still in the main accepted by the Latin Church, and forms the groundwork of the penitential discipline now in force in all countries which own the authority of the Roman See.

[1] Conc. Later. iv. *can.* 21 (Mansi, *conc.* xxii. 1008 ff.).

[2] *Summa theologica*, pars iii. qu. lxxxiv.–xc.; suppl. qu. i.–xxviii.

Aquinas begins by asking whether penitence is a sacrament. It belongs to a sacrament to have 'matter' and 'form.' At first sight penitence may seem to have neither: it is a disposition wrought by God in the soul, and has no external sign. Yet there are certain acts performed by the penitent which may be regarded as the 'matter' of sacramental penitence, while the words of absolution spoken by the priest—*Ego te absolvo*—are the 'form.' The sacrament of penitence is necessary to salvation in the case of every baptized person who has sinned after baptism, *i.e.* it is necessary for all members of the Church who have reached the age of discretion; the virtue of the Passion works through the priest's absolution, the penitent co-operating by means of penitence. The sacrament of penitence may be repeated as often as it is needed—*pluries est reiterabilis*.[1] In answer to the question, 'What is it that is remitted by absolution?' he answers that absolution takes away the guilt (*culpa*) and the eternal punishment of sin (*paena Gehennae*), but not the temporal punishment (*paena temporalis*), which remains until satisfaction for the sin has been perfectly made.

Aquinas retains the threefold division of penitence into contrition, confession, and satisfaction. (1) He

[1] For this view, which is in strong contrast with the primitive conception, Aquinas quotes a treatise *On true and false repentance* which he ascribes to St Augustine, but which modern editors have shewn to be a work of the eleventh or twelfth century.

distinguishes between contrition and a disposition which he calls attrition ; the former is moved by love, the latter by fear. Attrition is not of itself sufficient, but it may ripen into contrition, when love is added to fear, and then absolution may follow. (2) Confession should be made to a priest, since the priest only can give absolution. It must include all the sins that the penitent can call to mind. The confessor must observe absolute silence in regard to sins confessed to him, after the example of God Himself, who reveals no secret which is poured into His ear. (3) Satisfaction serves a double purpose : it does honour to God, and it serves as a check upon sin. Absolution must precede satisfaction, since no one can satisfy God who is not in a state of grace. Absolution restores the penitent to the state of grace ; yet there remains after absolution the *reatus culpae temporalis*, which can only be removed by satisfaction, to be made here or in purgatory. Relief in purgatory may be gained in part or in whole by means of 'indulgences' granted by the Church from the treasury of the merits of Christ and of the Saints which are at her disposal, upon the principle of supererogation. [1]

[1] *Supererogatio* (suggested by the O.L. and Vulg. of Luke x. 35 ὅτι ἂν προσδαπανήσῃς, *quodcumque supererogaveris*) is 'a payment in excess of what is due' : a term used by the Schoolmen to represent the superabundant merit of Christ and the Saints, gained through the fulfilment of 'counsels of perfection.' This store of merit

It is easy to see what a gigantic edifice the *Summa* has erected on the basis of the primitive doctrine of penitence. This has been done partly by working up old materials into new forms, partly by casting the old aside and substituting for them ideas of mediaeval growth. It was the merit or the misfortune of Aquinas that he gave expression to conceptions which had taken shape in many minds, and constituted a system of doctrine which is to this day the mainstay of the penitential teaching and discipline of the Latin Church.

Notwithstanding the support of Aquinas and of other great schoolmen the Lateran decree was not universally obeyed during the three centuries that passed between its issue and the posting of Luther's thesis on the door of the Church at Wittenberg (1517). In England great efforts were made to enforce the new rule, and even to reach a higher standard. In 1217 Richard le Poore, bishop of Salisbury, invited his flock to make three communions in the year, and to confess before each communion. His example was followed in 1236 by Edmund Rich, archbishop of Canterbury. But influences were at work which led in the opposite direction. In the next century the natural reluctance

was supposed to be in the keeping of the Church, to be applied by her for the relief of souls in need of spiritual help. See Aquinas, *Summa*, suppl. xxv., and the Anglican Article xiv., with Bp Gibson's comment upon it.

of the laity to use enforced confession was encouraged by the teaching of Wycliffe, who denounced compulsory confession to the priest. The fifteenth century witnessed a traffic in indulgences, which weakened the hands of the parish priests when they sought to bring their parishioners to confession. The trade of the 'pardoners' was nowhere more brisk than in England, and it bore baneful fruit. "Sinners say now-a-days," writes Thomas Gascoigne († 1458), "'I do not care how many sins I may have committed in God's sight, for I can easily get at the very shortest notice plenary remission of any fault and penance by an indulgence granted by the Pope, whose deed in writing to that effect I can have for a fourpence or a sixpence.'"[1] But the success of the pardoners was not altogether unconnected with the scholastic doctrine of supererogation, from which, in the minds of the uneducated and unspiritual, it was an easy step to the traffic which shocked the conscience of Europe and opened the floodgates of revolution in the Western Church.

[1] W. W. Capes, *The English Church in Cents. XIV., XV.*, p. 214.

## CHAPTER IV

# THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY AND AFTER

As the sixteenth century opened it became evident to the leaders of the Latin Church that the time for reform had come. The Church, it was generally agreed, must set her house in order, unless she was prepared to go down under the rising flood of hostile opinion; and efforts were not wanting on her part to brace herself for the great task. Five years before Luther's challenge Pope Julius II. had summoned a council to meet at the Lateran, with the reformation of the Church as a part of its programme; but practical difficulties were too strong, and the fifth Lateran Council broke up in 1517 without having accomplished any important work in that direction.[1] The demand for effective measures of reform, however, grew stronger from day to day. Luther and the German Protestants appealed to a free General Council; the reformers within the

[1] See *Cambridge Modern History*, ii. p. 31 f.; Whitney, *The Reformation*, p. 20 f.

Church were not less eager for it, and after much delay a new Council was called, which eventually met at Trent (1545).[1] The doctrine and discipline of penitence came before the Council in due course, and the results were promulgated, November 25, 1551.[2] It was then found that the Council, while guarding against practical abuses, which were admitted, had reaffirmed on all important points the teaching of Aquinas upon the subject before it. Penance, it declared, is a true and proper sacrament, to which the faithful should have recourse as often as they fall into sin after baptism (can. 1).[3] The matter of this sacrament is to be found in the acts and words of the penitent, viz. in his contrition, confession, and satisfaction (ch. 3). In confession all mortal sins are to be enumerated by him, so far as his memory serves; and such full confession is necessary before absolution (ch. 5 f.). The absolution of the priest is not simply declaratory, but a judicial act, which conveys the forgiveness of sins (ch. 6). Satisfaction consists in the payment of the penalty imposed by the priest, usually acts of fasting, prayer, or alms-giving, which through the merits of Christ compensates for sin, and at the same time serves as a dissuasive from repeating it (ch. 8, can. 13). The Catechism of the Council, in adapting its canons

[1] *C.M.H.* ii. p. 662 ff.; Whitney, p. 129 f.
[2] See Whitney, *op. cit.* p. 162 f.
[3] *Canones et decreta conc. Tridentini* (1564), p. 85 ff.

and definitions to the ends of pastoral instruction, is careful to point out that external penance avails little without the 'interior penance' of the heart. It explains that contrition, when perfect, is a "work of love, proceeding from filial fear," and that men are contrite for their sins in proportion as they love God (ch. 5, qu. 27). And it emphasizes the relation which exists between the satisfaction made by the penitent and that which our Lord offered on the Cross. The efficacy of penitential satisfaction depends entirely on the merit of Christ. "In Him we live," the Council teaches, "in Him we merit, in Him we satisfy; our glorying is in Christ and not in ourselves." To teach the necessity of satisfaction on the part of the penitent is not, it urges, to obscure the doctrine of grace, but rather to magnify it (ch. 5, qu. 67; can. 8).[1] While the principle of indulgences is reaffirmed, the traffic in them is censured and restrained. These concessions are not without interest and significance; nevertheless, it must be admitted that the Council did little more than endorse and endeavour to guard against abuse the scholastic doctrine of penitence as it was taught by Aquinas.

At the time when the Council of Trent formulated its canons on the subject of penitence, the first English Prayer-book had been in use for nearly

[1] For the originals the reader may refer to Winer, *Confessions of Christendom* (E. tr.), p. 298 ff.

three years. So far back as 1534 the Church of England had begun to reform herself on Catholic lines, independent alike of the Papacy and of foreign Protestantism. She was in no hurry to abandon penitential discipline, or even the mediaeval doctrine of penitence, until some better protection against laxity of life had been discovered. The third of the 'Articles about Religion,' issued by authority in 1536, describes penance as a sacrament instituted of Christ and consisting of three parts, contrition, confession, and amendment of life. Confession to a priest is necessary where it may be had; the people are to be instructed that they must give no less credence to the priest's absolution than they would give to the very voice of Christ, since the priest in absolution speaks by Christ's authority. And with regard to satisfaction, although the sacrifice of the death of Christ is the sufficient oblation, sacrifice, satisfaction, and recompense for the sins of the world, yet all men who are truly penitent must needs bring forth worthy fruits of penance—prayer, fasting, and almsdeeds.[1] The Sarum primer of 1538, reprinted by Maskell, contains a form of confession in English, which is an admirable embodiment of the best features of the mediaeval system.[2] The Bishops' Book of 1537 follows the leading of the "Articles

[1] *Formularies of Faith*, p. 8 ff.

[2] See Maskell, *Monumenta ritualia*, ii. p. 271 ff.

about Religion," and so does the King's Book, six years later on; but in the latter there are some significant changes of conception, *e.g.* the sacrament of penance is identified with absolution; satisfaction is now defined as "not to make to God any full or just recompense equivalent to the sins committed against Him (for that satisfaction hath only our Saviour Christ wrought in His glorious passion)," but "to please God with an humble lowly heart, ready to bring forth the fruits of penance."[1] Further, while "confession to the priest is in the Church profitably commanded to be used and frequented," yet "it is to be remembered that in case there lack a minister to pronounce the words of absolution ... if he [the penitent] truly repent him of his sinful life ... he shall undoubtedly have pardon and forgiveness of all his misdoings."[2] On the other hand, the Six Articles Act of 1539,[3] which imposed the penalty of imprisonment for the first offence and of death for the second upon any who should "contemptuously refuse to be confessed at the time commonly accustomed," was still on the statute book to the end of Henry's reign.

Henry VIII. died Jan. 28, 1547, and it was at once clear that great changes were imminent. In the same year communion in both kinds was restored

[1] *Formularies of Faith*, p. 96 ff. [2] *Ibid.* p. 257 ff.
[3] See Gee and Hardy, *Documents*, p. 311 ff.

to the laity, the chantries were dissolved, and the Six Articles were repealed. The way was now clear for liturgical reforms. On March 8, 1548, an English Order of Communion was issued.[1] It was a mere pamphlet of eighteen pages, an appendix to be used temporarily with the Latin Mass ; but it was significant enough of changes which would shortly follow. The first of the new English forms was an exhortation to be read on the Sunday or Holy Day next before a celebration of the Eucharist, dealing *inter alia* with the doctrine of penitence. "If ther be any of you," the priest is bidden to say, "whose conscience is troubled and greved in any thing, lackyng confort or counsaile, let him come to me or to some other dyscrete and lerned priest taught in the lawe of God, and confesse and open his synne and grief secretlye, that he may receave suche ghostlie counsaile, advise, and confort that his conscience maye be releved, and that of us as a minister of God and of the church he may receave conforte and absolution, to the satisfaction of his mynd, and avoyding of all scruple and doubtfulnes : requiring suche as shalbe satisfied with a generall confession, not to bee offended with them that doth use, to their further satisfying thauriculer and secret confession to the priest, nor those also which think nedeful or con-

[1] See the facsimile edition prepared for the Henry Bradshaw Society by H. A. Wilson.

venient for the quietnes of their awne consciences, particularly to open their synnes to the priest, to be offended with them whiche are satisfied with their humble confession to God and the generall confession to the Churche."

The change of attitude implied in these words is considerable. We hear no more of 'the sacrament of penance,' or of 'sacramental confession.' It is left to the discretion of each communicant whether he shall make confession of his sins to the priest before communion, or confess them only to God. Of satisfaction after confession and absolution nothing is said. As the order proceeds we find a "Generall Confession," to be made in the name of all the communicants, followed by an absolution which recognizes quite unmistakably the authority to absolve which Christ has left to His Church.[1]

The first Prayer Book of 1549 gave permanency to most of the forms provided in the Order of 1548. But it did more: it prescribed for use with the sick and at all private confessions an absolution after the Western mediaeval type, in which the priest is directed to say to the penitent, "I absolve thee from all thy sins." Moreover the new Ordinal addressed to the priest at his ordination the words of the risen Lord which convey the power of

[1] Compare with this the Sarum absolution of the Sick (Maskell, *Mon. rit.* i. p. 80).

absolution : "whose sins thou dost forgive, they are forgiven ; and whose sins thou dost retain, they are retained." And though the revised Prayer Book of 1552 laid considerably less emphasis on private confession, and abandoned the direction to use the personal form at all private confessions, it retained that form in the Visitation of the Sick, and the use of our Lord's words in the Ordering of Priests. So far were the revisers of 1552 from yielding the principle of ministerial absolution that they provided an additional "Absolution to be pronounced by the minister alone" at daily Morning Prayer.[1]

The year that saw the issue of the second Prayer Book produced also the forty-eight Articles of Religion. These contain nothing which bears directly on the doctrine of penitence, but the revised Articles of 1563 definitely refuse to acknowledge it as a sacrament of the Gospel, on the ground that it has no outward and visible sign ordained by God.[2]

We are now in a position to compare the Anglican teaching on penitence with the Tridentine. The English Church leads its penitents to confession and absolution, but is silent as to 'satisfaction,' except such

[1] This absolution, with the rest of the preliminary matter, was first prefixed to Evening Prayer in 1661.

[2] The 1563 Article runs : "Sacramentorum eandem cum Baptismo et Caena Domini rationem non habentes, quomodo nec paenitentia, ut quae signum aliquod visibile seu ceremoniam a Deo institutam non habeant."

as can be rendered by the offender to his brother-man. Of confession, besides that which is made directly to God in the privacy of the place of secret prayer, she recognizes two types: the general confession of the whole congregation assembled in the Church, and the private confession made by an individual to a priest, or rather to God in the presence of the priest. The latter is regarded as optional, and is recommended for use in cases where relief cannot be found in other ways. In neither case do confession and absolution constitute a sacrament of the Gospel such as Baptism or the Eucharist, which have outward and visible signs ordained by Christ.

With regard to the ancient public discipline which had been displaced by private penitence, our reformers frankly regretted its decay; even the restoration of the Lenten penance was in their judgement much to be wished.[1] Nor was the wish purely academical; a real effort was made to revive public penitence in the case of notorious sinners. There are numerous instances of such discipline being administered in our churches during the two centuries that followed the Reformation,[2] and the thirty-third Article still warns us that an excommunicated person "ought to be taken of the whole multitude of the faithful as an heathen and publican, until he be openly reconciled

[1] "A Commination ... to be read on the first day of Lent."

[2] See Dr. Wickham Legg's *English Church Life*, ch. viii.

by penance, and received into the Church by a judge that hath authority thereunto." To-day we seem, however, to be further than ever from the restoration of the ancient penitential discipline, while on the other hand there has been in our time a marked revival of private confession.[1] So long as the latter is voluntary, *i.e.* is not made a condition of communion, nor unduly urged upon the laity in the preaching or pastoral counsels of the clergy, it involves no departure in principle from the Anglican position, and may be regarded as a sign of the deepening of spiritual life in our communion and of the growing power of the Church to adapt herself to the needs of a new age. Of this there will be occasion to say more in the third part of this book.[2]

To turn now from West to East. What is the official doctrine of penitence in the Orthodox Church? A confession of the Orthodox Faith was drawn up in the seventeenth century for the use of the Russian Church by the metropolitan of Kieff, and afterwards accepted (1643) by the patriarchs of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem, and sanctioned by a synod at Jerusalem (1670).[3] This document recognizes seven "mysteries," of which penitence

[1] The practice had never been wholly abandoned in the Church of England; see Wickham Legg, *op. cit.* p. 263 ff.

[2] See below, p. 171 ff.

[3] Kimmel, *Monumenta fidei Ecclesiae Orientalis*, i. p. 56 ff.

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(ἡ μετάνοια) is one. Penitence, it says, is a genuine sorrow for the particular sin which it is intended to reveal to the priest, together with a firm resolution to amend, and the purpose of paying the penalty which may be imposed by the confessor.[1] A confession must cover all sins of which the penitent is conscious, since otherwise the priest cannot fix the penalty or absolve. The Church enjoins confession to be made four times in the year, but monthly confession is recommended in the case of the religious; on the other hand it is recognized that for simple folk a yearly confession may suffice.[2]

In several particulars this scheme comes nearer to the Roman position than to our own. But the Orthodox Church utterly repudiates the idea of a penal purgatory, and the Roman theory of indulgences. And how carefully guarded and modestly expressed are the forms of absolution in use among the Orthodox clergy may be seen by a glance at the Greek office for confession. Before absolving a penitent the confessor is instructed to say, "I, a humble sinner, have not the power to forgive sins on earth; God alone can do it. God pardon thee in this world, and in the world to come. Have no anxiety about the sin thou hast confessed: go in peace."[3]

[1] Kimmel, i. p. 170. [2] *Ibid.* p. 189 f.

[3] See Εὐχολόγων τὸ μέγα (Venice, 1855), p. 251 f. The office is printed also in Neale, *History of the Eastern Church*, i. p. 1013 ff., and in Littledale's *Offices of the Eastern Church*, pp. 44 ff., 162 ff.

In the Slavonic *Book of Needs*,[1] used in the Russian Church, the priest is directed to lead the penitent up to an icon of our Lord, and say to him, "I am only the witness, to bear witness before Him of all thou tellest me." The absolution that follows is after the Western rather than after the Greek type, and in fact approaches very near to the form provided in our Prayer Book at the visitation of the sick: "Our Lord and God Jesus Christ, by the grace and compassion of His love for man, forgive thee all thine iniquities; and I, an unworthy priest, by the power that is given me, forgive thee and release thee from all thy sins."

Something must be said of the attitude towards penitence maintained by the non-episcopal bodies which arose at the Protestant Reformation.

The Lutheran Confession of Augsburg (1530) regards penitence as consisting of contrition and faith. It disclaims any attempt to abolish absolution, which it interprets as a simple setting forth of the Gospel of Christ. The Smalkald Articles (1537) hold that confession and absolution are on no account to be abolished, since they offer help and consolation to tender and troubled consciences; in confession, however, the penitent should be left free to determine what sins he will confess. On the other hand the Helvetic Confession (1537) rules

[1] G. A. Shann, *Book of Needs*, p. 44 f.

that confession is to be made to God only or before the congregation ; to confess to a priest is not necessary. Calvin in his *Institutes* allows confession to be made in private to the pastor, but is careful to add that such confession must be optional.[1]

It appears that as a matter of fact confession before communion was customary among Lutherans till the middle of the eighteenth century, when it was superseded by general confession in the congregation. There has been, it is said, no revival of private confession in Protestant Germany such as has begun among ourselves, though the need of discipline has been widely recognized in the Lutheran body. Forms of absolution survive in more than one of the older Lutheran Service Books, and they also contain forms of public penance and reconciliation.[2]

The English Protestant denominations which have broken away from the Church of England since the Reformation retain no form of ministerial absolution. The early Puritans were content to ask for the removal of the term 'absolution' from the Prayer Book, a demand which James I. met by adding in the rubric near the beginning of Morning Prayer the explanatory words "or the Remission of Sins."[3] In 1661 the Non-conformist ministers further de-

[1] Winer, *Confessions*, pp. 305 f., 351.

[2] Daniel, *Codex liturgicus*, ii. pp. 366 f., 375 ff.

[3] Cardwell, *Conferences*, p. 132.

manded that the form in the visitation of the sick should run, "I pronounce thee absolved if thou truly repent and believe," and would have left to the discretion of the minister to determine whether he would give absolution or not.[1] It may be doubted whether their successors would be satisfied by any such concessions. Probably they would distrust any claim either to absolve or to declare absolved, expecting the voice of the Holy Spirit to bear witness to the individual penitent of God's forgiveness, if he has confessed his sin to God in penitence and faith. That our Lord left power to His Church to forgive sins seems to form no part of their creed, which regards the testimony of the individual conscience, guided by the Spirit as sufficient, without the authoritative act of the Body of Christ.

[1] Cardwell, *op. cit.* p. 331.

## CHAPTER V

# SUMMARY OF THE HISTORY

FROM the first the post-Apostolic Church assimilated the main points in the Biblical doctrine of sin and forgiveness, and these have never been in dispute among Catholic Christians. The Catholic Church has from the beginning realized the gravity of sin as a defiance of Almighty God, and an offence against His holiness; she has also from the beginning preached the necessity of Divine forgiveness, and that this forgiveness is offered to mankind through our Lord Jesus Christ. Further, she has always taught that an intimate relation exists between the offer of forgiveness and the sacrifice of the Death of Christ, His Resurrection and Ascension, and His life of intercession at the right hand of God. She has also recognized and to some extent endeavoured to fulfil the duty laid upon her by the Lord of proclaiming the Gospel of Forgiveness to the world, and using the power which Christ gave her to forgive and retain sins. Lastly, the

whole Church was and still is one in the belief that certain conditions must be fulfilled before the forgiveness of sins can be realized by the individual. All Christians recognize that among these conditions are contrition, *i.e.* a sincere sorrow for the sin, and detestation of it, with a stedfast purpose of amendment; and confession, *i.e.* acknowledgement before God of the sins committed against Him, and of the guilt in which they have involved the sinner.

Repentance, so the Church has taught from the first, is primarily a matter between the soul and God. Without interior penitence, or the turning of the heart to God, no outward act of penitence is availing. In like manner the forgiveness of sins is a gift imparted by God through His Spirit working upon the conscience of the penitent sinner. The Church has never and nowhere lost sight of this inwardness of true penitence and of Divine absolution. But penitence has also an outward side, and it is this which naturally comes into view as we follow the history of the Christian Society. Many sins are open, and call for open rebuke and, if the sinner repents, for open reconciliation, or if he is obdurate, for open separation from the Body of Christ. The purity of the Body demands that discipline shall be maintained among its members. Penitential discipline, accordingly, finds a place in the history of the Church from the second century onwards, and it is to

this external penitence that the name of repentance —μετάνοια, *paenitentia*, 'penance,'—is usually given by ancient Church writers rather than to the spiritual change of attitude and conduct which it is intended to express and effectuate.

In the ancient Church the dividing line between the world and the Kingdom of God was drawn by the act of baptism. Baptism was preceded by a solemn renunciation of "the Devil, his pomp, and his angels,"[1] a profession of repentance by which the catechumen put behind him his unregenerate life with its vices and errors. The act of bathing in the Threefold Name "for the remission of sins," which followed, was the medium and guarantee of a forgiveness which blotted out the guilt of the pre-baptismal life. That this baptismal repentance and remission ought to be the only penitence and absolution of the new life was the firm persuasion of the great teachers of the early Church; in their judgement it was all but inconceivable that there should be occasion for a fresh repentance and a fresh remission after baptism; once forgiven all his sins, the Christian should go and sin no more. But facts were against this idealism, and even the stern African divine, Tertullian, was compelled to allow a "second plank" for the Christian who had made shipwreck of his faith or life,—a second penitence and a second

[1] Tertullian, *De coron.* 3.

absolution after baptism. More than this he and his age would not concede; but later generations found it impossible to impose a limit of this kind.

Of post-baptismal sins the Church has always distinguished two groups—one consisting of the faults and lapses from which no Christian in this life is wholly free, and the other of the grosser sins which, whether committed openly or in secret, interrupt the life of grace and fellowship with God. With the former the ancient Church did not think it necessary to deal; she felt that it suffices for each individual to confess his daily sins to God, and that the daily prayer "Forgive us our trespasses" secures forgiveness for those which we penitently confess. But for open and grave sins a more drastic remedy is needed, especially when they are such as to put stumbling blocks in the way of fellow-Christians and to cause the enemy to blaspheme. For these the Church of the second and third centuries prescribed a public *exomologesis*—confession before the congregation, accompanied by signs of deep humiliation, and leading to a public reconciliation of which the bishop was the proper minister. So serious a step was seldom taken, it may be believed, until counsel had been sought from the bishop in a private interview, and in some cases such an interview was doubtless found sufficient, and the penitent was privately restored to communion. Thus there seems to have

grown up the use of private confession as a substitute for public penitence, and as the burden which such confessions laid upon the bishops became increasingly heavy, they delegated their authority in this matter to presbyters, who were known as penitentiaries. The older discipline of public *exomologesis* was not abandoned; the two systems worked side by side, but there was a constant tendency on the part of penitents to choose the easier way. In the East both systems broke down after the conversion of the Empire, with disastrous results; at Constantinople the collapse of discipline, as a contemporary historian has told us, was the occasion for a marked lowering of the standard of public morality. At Rome, and in the West generally, public penitence lingered on for some time longer, and the ritual of the Lenten fast still bears traces of the older discipline. But from the seventh or eighth century confessions were ordinarily heard in private by the parish priests, who, with the help of the Penitential Books, assigned the penance in each case, and gave absolution. In the opening years of the thirteenth century the time was ripe for binding the yoke of compulsory private confession on the neck of the Latin Church, and this was done by a canon of the fourth Lateran Council in 1215. The thirteenth century also witnessed the reduction of the floating mass of traditions and speculations in

reference to penitence to a complete system of doctrine by the scholastic divines, and especially in the *Summa theologica* of Thomas Aquinas. Penitence henceforth took an assured place among the sacraments, and sacramental penitence was accounted necessary to salvation. Every adult member of the Church must confess to his parish priest, and receive absolution. Absolution removes the guilt and eternal penalty of sin, but satisfaction must be made for the sin which has been remitted, and until this has been done the temporal penalty remains, and must be paid either in this life or after death in a penal purgatory. Relief may, however, be gained in purgatory through the sacrifice of the Mass, or from the superabundant merits of Christ and of the Saints, administered by the Church in the form of indulgences. This scheme as a whole was endorsed by the Council of Trent in 1545, and it is still 'of faith' in the Papal Church.

The Orthodox Church, both Greek and Russian, while numbering penitence among its mysteries or sacraments, and accepting generally the mediaeval doctrine as to its nature and contents, has steadily refused to sanction belief in a penal purgatory and the theory on which the grant of indulgences is based. It prescribes private confession at stated intervals, and authorizes its priests to give absolution in terms, however, which are more guarded than those used in the Latin West. Of the older Protestant bodies,

both Lutherans and Calvinists allowed private confession as a voluntary act, but the practice appears to have died out among them in modern times. The English Nonconformists do not recognize the value of ministerial absolution. The Church of England, true to her traditions, confers upon her priests at ordination the authority to forgive and retain sins which our Lord committed to the Christian Society, and provides a form of personal absolution which scarcely falls short of the explicitness and directness of the mediaeval form. On the other hand, she leaves private confession to a priest a voluntary act, and does not urge or even recommend it except in cases where the conscience is troubled, or when death may be at hand. But as a matter of fact, since the Restoration, it has been the habit of not a few devout members of this Church to confess their sins and seek absolution in this way, and the last seventy years have witnessed a remarkable extension of this practice both among the clergy and among lay people of both sexes. Attempts to revive the public discipline of the ancient Church, however, have ceased among us. The English Church still recognizes the expediency of such discipline when it may be had; but it may be doubted whether the temper of our age will tolerate any form of penitence which is not private or voluntary.

# III

# THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS IN THE EXPERIENCE OF LIFE

ἐὰν καταγινώσκῃ ἡμῶν ἡ καρδία, μείζων ἐστὶν
ὁ θεὸς τῆς καρδίας ἡμῶν καὶ γινώσκει πάντα . . .
ἐὰν ἡ καρδία μὴ καταγινώσκῃ, παρρησίαν ἔχομεν
πρὸς τὸν θεόν.

1 John iii. 20, 21.

## CHAPTER I

# THE SENSE OF PERSONAL SIN AND GUILT

THE forgiveness of sins cannot be realized as a personal possession, as the gift of God to the individual, until sin and the guilt which it implies have been realized by the individual as a personal burden and grief. As the doctrine of forgiveness cannot be apprehended without some previous knowledge of the meaning and extent of sin, so there can be no experience of forgiveness until there has been some experience of the bitterness of sin.

From the doctrine that all men have sinned, and come short of the glory of God, to the sincere confession "I have sinned," there is logically but a single step. But it is a step which is taken by comparatively few of those who recognize the fact of universal sinfulness. A yet smaller minority are ready to confess particular acts of sin; for to say, 'I have sinned' is easier than to say, "Thus and thus have I done."[1] In many cases men are not so much

[1] Josh. vii. 20.

unwilling to confess sin as unconscious that they have sinned.

The sense of personal guilt is even more uncommon. Many who do not deny that they have sinned, altogether fail to see that their sin entails guilt, *i.e.* a permanent liability to be called to account for it. It was committed long ago, in early manhood or womanhood; its immediate effects have long disappeared; it has been atoned for by a conspicuously pure and useful life. It seems incredible that God should remember against men sins which they themselves have forgotten, or which they have outlived or overcome. Reasoning of this kind depends on very inadequate conceptions both of the nature of sin and of the character of God; but it is often heard, and when not audibly uttered, is apt to be latent in the mind and to silence the voice of conscience or of the Spirit of God.

The difficulty of realizing personal sin and guilt is especially great among those whose lives have been blameless, and who are conscious of having diligently discharged their duty to society, and, so far as regards the external requirements of religion, to God. Yet such persons may fall far short of the standard of the Divine requirements, lacking genuine faith and love, and guided in all the movements of life by an egoism which is centred in self. Forgiveness of sins can mean nothing to one whose inmost thought is,

'I have not sinned': 'I have no sin.'[1] Yet forgiveness is as much needed by the Scribes and Pharisees of modern society as by its Publicans. The bacillus is not less dangerous because it evades our sight; sins of which we do not suspect the presence poison our life as surely as those which are "evident, going before unto judgement."[2] Unsuspected sins are in fact the most full of peril; the soul drifts gaily down the stream, unconscious of the cataracts ahead, incredulous or resentful when it is warned by the preacher or by the voice of God within.

There is no remedy for this but the conviction which is forced upon us by the word and Spirit of God. "Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for conviction" (πρὸς ἐλεγμόν);[3] that is one of the purposes for which it was written. Of the Holy Spirit more is said: He was not only given for this end, but He fulfils it; "when he is come he shall convict (ἐλέγξει) the world in respect of sin."[4] The conviction of the world began at the Pentecost and has proceeded from that day to this. But it proceeds ordinarily not in great sweeping movements, though these have not been wanting in the history of the Church; but by bringing home to individuals, one by one, the reality and the horror of sin in all its forms. The Holy Spirit compels men to recognize the pre-

[1] 1 John i. 8, 10.
[2] 1 Tim. v. 24.
[3] 2 Tim. iii. 16.
[4] John xvi. 8.

sence of sin in their own lives, saying to the individual conscience, as Nathan said to David, "Thou art the man."[1] Sin is seen in a new light when it is brought home in this way. The general confessions of the Church at Mattins and Evensong and at the Eucharist no longer wear the appearance of exaggeration,—"there is no health in us," "the remembrance [of our sins] is grievous unto us, the burden of them is intolerable"—words from which we have secretly shrunk as in excess of the truth—now at length find a true and full echo in our hearts.

This sense of sin does not lessen as years advance and the end comes into view, even though time may bring a deepening sense of forgiveness. It is in the latest group of his epistles, when he is near the end of a noble life, that St Paul writes, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief."[2] "I obtained mercy," he immediately adds, but the sense of forgiveness has not blunted the sense of sin; the memory of the sin committed thirty years before is still with him as in the first years of his new life. The sense of forgiveness indeed intensifies the sense of sin, for it reveals the greatness of the love against which our sins are directed. It deepens penitence, while it inspires hope. The sense of sin and the sense of forgiveness coexist in the Christian consciousness, strengthening and deepening each other.

[1] 2 Sam. xii. 7. [2] 1 Tim. i. 15.

St John's vision of the future shews them coexisting still in the perfect life; the Lamb bearing the marks of the Passion, "as though it had been slain," and the robes of the saints washed white in His Blood,[1] witness eternally to past sins, although their guilt has long vanished. The memory of sin remains, though only to enhance adoration and love.

The sense of personal sin, then, is a fundamental fact of Christian experience. Where it does not exist, the experience of the Christian life has not begun; when it is deep and habitual, the foundations of a life in fellowship with God are securely laid. There is indeed a morbid sense of sin, the result of excessive and unbalanced self-introspection, which is of another character, refusing to believe the Divine love and to accept the Divine gift. Such a condition may be due to physical weakness or mental disease, and may end in religious mania; or it may be the upgrowth of a false humility which is but a specious form of pride. Men and women will sometimes speak effusively of their sins, while they would resent the suggestion of a friend or of a parish priest who took them at their word, and urged amendment of life. With the uneducated this is by no means an uncommon form of self-deception. Such persons rarely mislead the experienced guide of souls, but they may impose upon themselves and make the way of true

[1] Apoc. v. 6, vii. 14.

repentance increasingly difficult and in the end well nigh impossible. More perplexing is the resolute silence with which appeals to the conscience are often met. This, however, may be not a sign of insensibility, but due to natural diffidence or reserve. There may be a very true sense of personal sin and heartfelt confession before God, though the lips are sealed in the presence of a fellow-man. Such reticence is not, perhaps, ideal; it does not answer to the picture of primitive Christian life which St James draws when he urges his readers to confess their sins one to another and pray one for another;[1] it renders pastoral intercourse hard and, so far as we can judge, barren of results. But it may go along with a real repentance towards God, and under its protection there may be built up in "the hidden man of the heart"[2] a strong Christian character which will shew itself eventually in an effective Christian life.

[1] James v. 16; see p. 69 ff. [2] 1 Pet. iii. 4.

## CHAPTER II

# THE GREAT RECONCILIATION

SIN separates from God, fixing a gulf between God and the soul, which the sinner cannot either remove or pass. "The mind of the flesh (the seat of sin) is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be."[1] If there is to be reconciliation or peace between God and man, it is from God that the first approach must come.

It came in the incarnation of the Word, and in the human life and death of the Incarnate. "We have received the reconciliation"; "while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son."[2] "God reconciled us to himself through Christ"; "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not reckoning unto them their trespasses."[3]

This reconciliation, this at-one-ment of God and man, is in the New Testament connected more especially with the death of Christ. He "died for

[1] Rom. viii. 7. [2] Rom. v. 9-11. [3] 2 Cor. v. 18 f.

our sins"; He "was delivered up for our trespasses"; He "bore our sins in his own body upon the tree"; He "offered one sacrifice for sins for ever."[1] So the Apostolic writers speak, and the Christian consciousness through the centuries has echoed this teaching, while the Christian experience has confirmed it, looking to the Cross for peace with God, and finding it there. Yet when the question is asked, as it has been asked by the faithful in all ages, 'How did the death of Jesus Christ effect the great reconciliation?' the Church has no one definite or completely satisfactory answer to give. Attempts have been made to answer this question by her greatest and most saintly intellects: in early days by Irenaeus, Origen, Athanasius, Hilary, Augustine; in the middle ages by Anselm, Abelard, Aquinas; in recent years by Dale, M'Leod Campbell, Moberly, Du Bose, and others. Each of these has a theory to propound which satisfies his own mind and the minds of a band of followers; none has formulated a doctrine which carries the assent of the Church as a whole.[2] The Catholic Church is still content, and possibly will always be content, with the simple words of the Creed: "Who for us men, and for our salvation

[1] The prepositions vary: thus ὑπέρ is used in 1 Cor. xv. 3, Heb. x. 12; περί in 1 Pet. iii. 18; διά (with acc.) in Rom. iv. 25.

[2] For good summaries of the history of the doctrine see Moberly, *Atonement and Personality*, pp. 324-412; J. K. Mozley, *Doctrine of the Atonement*, pp. 94-201.

came down from heaven, . . . and was made man, and was crucified also for us." [1]

This is not said by way of complaint. It is probably far better that the Church should abstain (as she has hitherto done) from formulating a doctrine of the Atonement—that she should leave the subject open to the devout consideration of the Christian intellect. The subject is too vast, it runs up into mysteries too remote or impenetrable to encourage the hope that any teacher, however great, any age of the Church, however ripe, will be able to express it in a single form of words. It may well be that nearly all the theories which have been propounded contain some element of truth, and that if a doctrine of the Atonement should ever be put forth by the authority of the whole Church it will be found to embody points of view as seemingly opposite as those, *e.g.*, of Anselm and Abelard. Views which seem to be contradictory may be in truth complementary ; it may be seen that the death of Christ is at once both the payment of our debt and the standing monument of Divine love, both vicarious and representative, both penal and penitential, and much more than any term or pair of contrasted terms can possibly convey. Who can expect to embrace in his own limited field of vision the full meaning, the

[1] *τὸν δι' ἡμᾶς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους καὶ διὰ τὴν ἡμετέραν σωτηρίαν κατελθόντα . . . σταυρωθέντα τε ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν.*

whole content, of the Death of the sinless Christ, the Incarnate Son of God? Such an event may well be beyond the power of our faculties to apprehend and of our words to express.

But however our Lord's death is to be explained, or even if it cannot, in our present imperfection, be explained at all, the fact remains that it is represented to us as the great act of reconciliation in which God once for all made peace with the world, and placed the forgiveness of sins within the reach of all mankind. The sacrifice of the Cross is not, of course, to be separated either from the Incarnation on the one hand or from the Resurrection, Ascension, and heavenly life of our Lord on the other. It is the Incarnation which gives to the death of Jesus Christ its infinite value and spiritual force; and it is the life of perpetual intercession in heaven which makes the One Sacrifice operative to the end of time. "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father ... and he is the Propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world."[1] It is the death of Christ regarded as the consummation of His past life of perfect obedience to the Father's will, and as the historical basis of His present life of self-presentation before the Throne of God, which is the

[1] 1 John ii. 2 *αὐτὸς ἱλασμός ἐστιν*: He *is*, not He was, Himself the Propitiation. The Cross belongs to past history; the Propitiation abides and lives in the present and to the world's end.

reconciling power still at work in the world. If the Cross of the Incarnate redeemed us, the life of the Crucified justifies and saves.[1]

But if Christ died for all, and is the living Propitiation for the whole world, why is the forgiveness of sins not bestowed on all? On God's part the reconciliation is complete: it embraces the world. It is His will that all men should be saved, and He has appointed one mediator between God and man, who is Himself man and who gave Himself a ransom for all.[2] Nothing is wanting that God can do to reconcile the world unto Himself. But in a reconciliation there must needs be two parties, both desirous of peace, and both taking steps to bring it about. It is as necessary that man should be reconciled to God, as that God should be reconciled to man. God for His part has not only sent to mankind the good tidings of His goodwill to us in Christ, but condescends to plead with men by His ambassadors for their return to a state of peace with Himself; "We," St Paul writes, "are ambassadors on behalf of Christ, as though God were intreating you by us: we beseech you on behalf of Christ, be ye reconciled to God."[3] Divine Love can go no further, without

[1] Cf. Rom. iv. 25, v. 9, 10 (*κατηλλάγημεν τῷ θεῷ διὰ τοῦ θανάτου τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ . . . σωθησόμεθα ἐν τῇ ζωῇ αὐτοῦ*).

[2] 1 Tim. ii. 5 f.

[3] 2 Cor. v. 20 *καταλλάγητε τῷ θεῷ*.

doing violence to the freedom of the will, its own gift to our race.

The Atonement avails, then, only when men of their free choice accept the offer of God, lay down the arms of a rebellious will, and surrender to the Divine mercy. In this surrender, this reconciliation of man to God, the central and vital act is faith, *i.e.* a frank and full trust in God, which takes Him at His word and throws itself unconditionally on His promised forgiveness in Christ. Such a trust breaks down the old enmity, the suspicion and aversion with which the sinner regards God, and converts it into a yearning love. "I will arise," it says, "and go to my Father." The Father meets His returning son while he is yet a long way off from home, and the reconciliation is complete.

To believe in the Atonement is necessary; to understand it fully is neither necessary nor, for a finite intelligence, possible. The impenetrable mystery which shrouds the Cross gives greater scope for the exercise of faith. That no intellectual effort can grasp the full meaning of the sacrifice of the death of Christ takes from it none of its power to loose men from their sins. That which the Cross did potentially for the whole world it does in actual experience for the individual soul which it brings back to God. "He loved me and gave himself for me"[1] is the

[1] Gal. ii. 20; cf. 1 Tim. i. 18.

witness borne not only by the great saint who heard the voice of Christ calling him from heaven, but by tens of thousands of men and women to whom His call has come in the ordinary ministrations of His Church. "I believe in the forgiveness of sins" is not merely an article of the Christian's creed, which he is bound to accept out of loyalty to his faith, but the direct and spontaneous witness of his own consciousness. The forgiveness of sins through the sacrifice of the Cross and the intercession of the glorified Christ is attested by the experience of life.

## CHAPTER III

# THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION

THE Great Reconciliation has been effected by the Sacrifice of our Lord. But it needs to be administered, and the administration is committed by Christ to His Body, the Church.

In the New Creation, as in the old, all things are of God (ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ); He is the Author and Source of all. It was "God who reconciled us to himself through Christ";[1] it is God who draws men to Himself by the Spirit of grace. But it is God's good pleasure to convey His gifts to man through man. The Mediator through whom the reconciliation is carried forward is "himself man";[2] it is as the Son of Man that He has authority to forgive sins on earth,[3] and when He was about to leave the world He left this authority to men. He breathed on the representatives of the Church, and said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost; whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; whose

[1] 2 Cor. v. 17 f.

[2] 1 Tim. ii. 5 ἄνθρωπος Χριστὸς Ἰησοῦς.

[3] Mark ii. 10 ἐξουσίαν ἔχει ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου.

soever sins ye retain, they are retained."[1] The commission was for the Body and not only for the ten Apostles and the few other disciples who were with Him on the occasion when these words were spoken. St Paul was not among them, but he claims a part in the gift for himself and his colleagues. "God," he says, "gave unto us the ministry of the Reconciliation ... placing in our hands (*θέμενος ἐν ἡμῖν*) the word of the Reconciliation"; "we are ambassadors therefore on behalf of Christ."[2] As the majesty of Rome was represented by the legate (*πρεσβευτής*), who could act or speak for the Emperor in high matters of policy or administration,[3] so the Apostles and their successors in the ministry of the Church represent, act and speak for, Christ, as Christ represented the Father. "Let a man so account of us," St Paul says elsewhere, "as of ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God."[4] Or to use yet another Pauline phrase, the ministers of the Church have been put in trust with the Gospel;[5] it is theirs both to guard and to dispense, and the administration of this great trust is at once the business, the responsibility, and the joy of their lives.

In committing to His Church the work of ministering the forgiveness of sins our Lord gave no direc-

[1] John xx. 23. [2] 2 Cor. v. 19 f.

[3] Cf. Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, p. 379 f.

[4] 1 Cor. iv. 1. [5] 1 Thess. ii. 4; 1 Tim. i. 11; Tit. i. 3.

tions as to the methods to be adopted of fulfilling this charge. He gave her the power to minister, but left the manner of using the power to the Church herself, guided by the Holy Spirit. Yet He prescribed certain actions which are a sufficient guide to His general purpose. Such commands as "Preach the Gospel to the whole creation"; "make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them ... teaching them";[1] "do this in remembrance of Me,"[2] mark out with sufficient distinctness the lines on which the ministry of reconciliation is to proceed. First, there is the proclamation of the message of forgiveness to the world; then the gathering of those who believe the message and desire to be at peace with God into a world-wide society, a catholic Church, by baptism into the Name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; the strengthening and refreshing of the baptized by the body and blood of Christ received in the Eucharist, and their gradual instruction in the principles of the Christian faith and life. These were the lines laid down by Christ, and followed by the original Apostles and by St Paul. There are a few instances recorded in the Acts and Epistles in which the sins of an offending Christian were formally retained,[3] or in which the offender was restored to communion by

[1] 'Mark' xvi. 15; Matt. xxviii. 19 f.

[2] Luke xxii. 19; 1 Cor. xi. 24 f.

[3] *e.g.* 1 Cor. v. 3 ff.; 1 Tim. i. 20.

the act of the Church endorsed by the Apostle "in the person of Christ" (*i.e.* as Christ's representative).[1] But there is no indication that the Church of the Apostolic age used in ordinary cases a direct form of absolution, such as our Lord's "Thy sins are forgiven thee." On the other hand, the remission of sins was definitely connected with the sacrament of baptism. It was realized that Christian baptism was "unto the remission of sins,"[2] that it had been instituted for this end that at the very beginning of his new life the Christian might wash away the sins of his unregenerate years, and start, as it were, with a clean sheet;[3] that "by the washing of water with the word" the Bride of Christ was cleansed and sanctified.[4] It was also realized that Christians who were conscious of having sinned after baptism might be assured of the forgiveness of the sins which they confessed, since they had an Advocate in the presence of the Father, who is the Propitiation for their sins.[5] Of the other great Christian sacrament as a means of remission less is said; but the communion of the Body of Christ and of the Blood of the Covenant cannot but seal afresh to the faithful the forgiveness which the sacrifice of the Cross obtained and which the New Covenant guarantees to the people of God.[6]

[1] 2 Cor. ii. 5 ff.; cf. Gal. vi. 1.
[2] Acts ii. 38.
[3] Acts xxii. 16; cf. 2 Peter i. 9.
[4] Eph. v. 26.
[5] 1 John i. 9, ii. 1 f.
[6] 1 Cor. x. 16; Matt. xxvi. 28; Heb. viii. 12 (cf. Jer. xxxi. 34).

Thus the evidence, so far as it goes, leads us to believe that the Church of the Apostolic age fulfilled the Lord's commission chiefly by the preaching of the Gospel and the ministration of the two great sacraments. And these are still and must always be the primary factors in the ministry of reconciliation. The Gospel is "the word of reconciliation" (ὁ λόγος τῆς καταλλαγῆς), and he who proclaims it with the authority which the Church has received from Christ and commits to her priests, forgives sins in the sense that he delivers God's message of forgiveness, which is effectual wherever it is received with penitence and faith. In the sacraments of the Gospel the remission of sins is definitely applied to the soul, which is grafted into Christ in Baptism, and in the Eucharist is washed through His most precious Blood from sins committed after baptism. He who ministers these two great sacraments forgives sins in the only sense in which they can be forgiven by a human minister: he is the instrument which God uses to convey to souls the assurance of His pardon and grace.

The Church, however, is not limited to these primary means of dispensing the Divine forgiveness. She is left free to use the authority which the Lord has given her in whatever manner she may judge to be most expedient for the age to which she is called to minister. Such subsidiary ministrations of the

remission of sins may be used in one age and withdrawn in another, as the wisdom of the Church directs. Thus the penitential discipline of the primitive Church has lapsed, and no one would now propose to revive it in its original form. Nor is it requisite that the same system should be observed in all churches at the same time; the circumstances of the Catholic Church in one country may call for methods which are not followed in another. For many centuries forms of absolution have been everywhere in use as means of conveying the remission of sins to penitents. The Orthodox Church, the Roman Church, the Anglican Church, agree in the use of such forms, differing only in regard to the forms employed, and the conditions under which they are ministered. In the English Church absolutions are of two kinds, public or congregational, and private or particular. Of public absolutions we have two forms: that which is used in the preparation of communicants for their communion, and that which belongs to the daily Mattins and Evensong. The former follows the ancient manner of absolving: the bishop (or the priest, if the bishop is not present) intercedes for penitents on behalf of the Church which he represents: "Almighty God ... pardon and deliver you from all your sins." The absolution in the daily offices, on the other hand, is declaratory, an authoritative proclamation of the Gospel in brief: "Almighty

God ... who ... hath given power and commandment to His ministers to declare and pronounce to his people, being penitent, the absolution and remission of their sins: He pardoneth and absolveth." In both cases the absolution has for its purpose the removal of the burden of sin from the consciences of the worshippers before they enter on the act of worship which is to follow.

The remaining English form of absolution is of another type. It is not general or congregational, but personal, and in it the priest, for the sake of greater definiteness, speaks to the penitent in his own name, as representing Christ: "by His authority committed to me, I absolve thee from all thy sins." Here the English Church has adhered very nearly to the mediaeval model, which was regarded as the 'form' of the sacrament of penance; and it has become not uncommon among us to speak of this form as 'sacramental,' and to regard it as having a validity which does not attach to the general or congregational absolutions. But (1) if a sacrament is "an outward and visible sign ... ordained by Christ Himself," no absolution can be in the stricter sense sacramental, since it has no such visible sign. And (2) there is no good reason for attributing to personal absolution a value which does not belong to one which is congregational, or to the direct "I absolve thee" an absolving power which does not come to the penitent

through an intercessory or a declaratory form. The Church of England in retaining the mediaeval form has certainly not accepted with it the mediaeval theory that this form alone conveys to the penitent the grace of absolution. She intends her members to take to themselves the comfortable sense of God's forgiveness as they listen to the intercessory absolution which precedes communion, and the declaratory absolution which precedes 'Our Father' at morning and evening prayer. The form provided for private ministrations is especially impressive; it is direct and personal, as the occasion requires; but it has no exclusive claim to fulfil the Lord's commission to the Church to forgive sins in His name.

Absolution, of whatever kind, must be preceded by confession, for confession is an essential preliminary of forgiveness; "if we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins."[1] The confession is general in the case of a congregational absolution; in the case of an individual seeking personal absolution it must be specific. And this for two reasons: (1) The individual conscience accuses itself of particular sins, which must be confessed; vague generalities will not bring it peace; and (2) the priest must be put in possession of the facts, in order that he may be able to give spiritual counsel according to the needs of the case, and, further, to judge

[1] 1 John i. 9.

whether absolution should be given at once or, in the interests of the penitent, withheld for a time.

Private confession, leading to private and individual absolution, was not, as we have seen, normal in the early Church. It had, so far as we know, no Apostolic precedent, and when it came into use it was employed only when there was some doubt whether the sin was such as to call for public penitence. Centuries passed before Christians began to bring to the priest the sins of ordinary life; centuries more before it was ruled by a Western Council that such confession was obligatory. The Catholic Church in this country has with good reason refused to endorse this action of the Latin West, while on the other hand she has retained the ministry of private confession and absolution. It has been retained, however, if we may judge from the teaching of the Book of Common Prayer, as an exceptional remedy rather than as an ordinary means of grace. The Church recommends its use before Holy Communion "if there be any . . . who by this means [self-examination, confession to God, satisfaction to an injured neighbour, and other acts of repentance] cannot quiet his own conscience, but requireth further comfort or counsel." She directs that a "sick person be moved to make a special confession of his sin, if he feel his conscience troubled with any weighty matter." There are only two cases in which confession to a priest in private is

suggested as expedient. On the other hand, the principle of voluntary confession is accepted, and in no circumstances is its private use forbidden. Any member of the Church of England who desires to confess to his parish priest can claim to be heard, and no parish priest can rightly refuse to hear a confession tendered by a parishioner. Indeed, in view of the fact that the Church permits her members to open their grief to a "discreet and learned minister of God's word" other than the parish priest, it would seem that no English priest can decline to receive a penitent without incurring a grave responsibility.

At present there is a tendency among the English laity to use private confession as a normal habit of their life in Christ. It may be doubted whether the constant use of a special remedy is likely in the long run to strengthen and develope the religious life, or to encourage the breadth of vision and the healthy virility and independence which have been characteristic of the best type of Anglican Christianity. But this is a matter of which each adult member of the Church must be left free to judge for himself. "Let each man," St Paul would rule in such a case, "be fully assured in his own mind."[1] It is fair to say that many of those who use private confession habitually are among the most devout and faithful sons and daughters of the English Church. And

[1] Rom. xiv. 5.

the warning of the first Prayer Book of 1549 is opportune to-day: "requiring such as shall be satisfied with a general confession not to be offended with them that do use, to their further satisfying, the auricular and secret confession to the priest; nor those also which think needful or convenient, for the quietness of their own consciences, particularly to open their sins to the priest, to be offended with them that are satisfied with their humble confession to God and the general confession to the Church, but in all things to follow and keep the rule of charity." This weighty sentence was withdrawn in 1552, probably because it was no longer necessary, the decay of private confession having become by that time general; but it embodies the very spirit of the Church, and deserves the close attention of both the great schools of thought and life which still exist, and perhaps will always exist, within the Anglican fold.

The duty of the clergy in reference to the use of private confession seems to be clear. As we have seen, they must be prepared to receive confessions, and from time to time the parish priest must read to his people the longer exhortation to communion, in which members of the congregation who cannot quiet their own consciences are invited to come to him, or to some other competent priest, for the purpose. In cases of sickness he must "move" the

sick person who has weighty sins upon his conscience to confess them. But he has no authority from the Church to urge the habit of regular confession as a duty, or to represent it as a means of grace without which the highest type of Christian life cannot be attained, or to make it practically a condition of admission to confirmation or communion. To do this is to strike at the root of the liberty with which in this church Christ, as we believe, has set us free.

The ministry of reconciliation, the commission to forgive and retain sins, is a far greater and wider trust than the hearing of confessions and the pronouncing or withholding of formal absolutions. Important and valuable as this special ministry of penitence may be, it is but a part, and a minor part, of the great work committed by the Church to her priests. They are charged with the ministry of the word and the two great sacraments of the Gospel; and it is through these that the forgiveness of sins is primarily dispensed. Private confession and absolution are a subsidiary means for the quieting of the conscience, appointed by the wisdom of the Church, and conveying to the true penitent the assurance of pardon and acceptance with God; but care is needed, both on the part of the clergy who hear confessions and of the laity who use this help, not to disturb the balance of the Christian life by attaching a

disproportionate value to a practice which had no place in primitive Christianity, and is therefore not essential to the spiritual wellbeing of the members of Christ.

## CHAPTER IV

# THE SENSE OF FORGIVENESS

FORGIVENESS is an act of God which may or may not be followed immediately by a sense of relief. "I believe in the forgiveness of sins" does not mean 'I believe that my sins are forgiven,' but simply, 'I believe that God in Christ forgives the sins of all who truly repent and believe the Gospel, and for the pardon of my own sins I place my trust in the mercy of God revealed through His Son.' The consciousness of being forgiven is not invariably a result of justification. There are those who, confusing the two, stand in doubt of fellow-Christians who cannot share their confidence. Yet St John clearly recognizes that the verdict of the individual conscience is not final: our hearts may condemn, and yet God who "is greater than our heart and knoweth all things" may acquit or justify.[1] Judgements passed upon a man either by his neighbour or by him-

[1] 1 John iii. 20. See Bp Westcott's and Dr Brooke's notes on the interpretation of this passage.

self are, as St Paul has taught us, liable to revision by the Supreme Judge in the day of Christ.[1] On the whole there is greater probability that favourable judgements will be reversed than unfavourable; we are more likely to be wrong when we acquit ourselves than when we condemn. Forgiveness is necessary to our salvation; the sense of being forgiven is not. There are souls from which the darkness does not lift until the end of life. *Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?* is their cry almost to the last; and yet their penitence is deep, and their faith in our Lord and love to Him are beyond doubt. They are forgiven, but they do not realize it till the day breaks and the shadows flee away.

Yet it is very much to be desired that Christian people may not only be forgiven but may know that they are forgiven. St Paul ends his great argument upon justification with an appeal to his readers to realize their acceptance: "being therefore justified by faith let us (so the Revised Version rightly reads) have peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord"; [2] *i.e.* let us live in the consciousness of the Divine love, and be reconciled to God as He is to us. The reason for this exhortation is apparent; there can be no free access to God, no intimate fellowship

[1] 1 Cor. iv. 3 ff.

[2] Rom. v. 1 εἰρήνην ἔχωμεν. The reading followed by A.V. (ἔχομεν) rests on correctors of ℵB, the two Graeco-Latin MSS. FG, and cursive MSS. See the good note in Sanday and Headlam (p. 120).

with the Father of our spirits, so long as we remain in doubt of His forgiving love. "If," on the other hand, "our heart condemn us not," if it responds to absolving voice, "then have we confidence towards God, and whatever we ask we receive of Him."[1] The boldness or frankness of speech (*παρρησία*) which the New Testament recommends in our approaches to God,[2] is stifled by the consciousness of some unremitted sin, or even by the suspicion that sin has not been remitted, or that subsequent sins have cancelled the original remission.

But how, it may be asked, is the sense of forgiveness to be realized, so long as we are here, without fear of presumption or self-deception? St Paul has given us a clue to the true answer: "the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are children of God."[3] The testimony of conscience needs to be corroborated by a witness greater than conscience—by the Spirit of God. Two voices speak in the Christian heart: the voice of the human spirit and the voice of the Divine. When they agree in bearing witness to our acceptance, no doubt can remain; the heart may distrust its own verdict, but cannot distrust the testimony of the Holy Spirit. But the question arises how the Divine voice makes itself heard? The

[1] 1 John iii. 21 f.

[2] Cf. *e.g.* Eph. iii. 12; Heb. iv. 16, x. 19; 1 John v. 14.

[3] Rom. viii. 16.

answer assuredly is that the Spirit speaks in all the movements of the new life, within and without; in repentance and faith and love, in the spirit of adoption which cries within us and wherein we cry Abba, Father, in intercessions made within our hearts with groanings which are beyond and more than words; in the manifold experience of comfort in suffering, strength in weakness, victory under temptation, perseverance under trial; in the ripening fruit of love, joy, peace, and the other products of Divine indwelling. In so far as these things are in us and abound, they bear witness to the reality of our reconciliation with God, and therefore confirm, with the very voice of His Spirit, our assurance that our sins are forgiven. Forgiven we have been once for all in the sacrament of Baptism, and when we have sinned afresh and repented and confessed our sins, the Church to which Christ left power to absolve has again and again pronounced that the baptismal remission is renewed. But neither baptism nor absolution can assure us of pardon unless the inner witness answers to the sacramental gift. And the inner voice which responds to the absolving words of Christ speaking by the Church is the voice of the Spirit of Christ, speaking in the heart and confirming its witness with "signs following"—the spiritual miracles of a life which is risen with Christ and at peace with God.

## CHAPTER V

# THE LIFE OF THE FORGIVEN

In the Divine order forgiveness stands at the very beginning of the new life. Justification is not deferred until some progress has been made in holiness, but follows immediately upon faith and baptism.[1] The reason is clear. Until the sinner is forgiven, he cannot enter upon the life of the Spirit, the life which is "life indeed."[2] We are forgiven, we are justified, in order that we may live the life of God.

1. The life of the forgiven is a life redeemed by the Blood of Christ, and therefore His by right of purchase. "Our great God and Saviour . . . gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a people who are his property."[3] "Ye

[1] Rom. iv. 5. God δικαιοῖ τὸν ἀσεβῆ, *i.e.* He does not wait for the life of εὐσέβεια, but anticipates it as soon as its foundation is laid in repentant faith.

[2] 1 Tim. vi. 19 τῆς ὄντως ζωῆς.

[3] Titus ii. 14 λαὸν περιούσιον. Cf. Exod. xix. 5, LXX, where λαὸς περιούσιος represents עַם סְגֻלָּה. On περιούσιος see Lightfoot, *On a Fresh Revision of the N. T.* p. 236 ff.

are a people for possession."[1] Like so much else in the language of the New Testament, the terms 'property' and 'possession' in these passages come from the Greek Old Testament, where they are used of the relation in which ancient Israel stood to God. To Israel, redeemed from Egyptian bondage, God had said, "If ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me from among all peoples."[2] The words are true, in a deeper sense, of the New People, the Israel of God, who have been redeemed from sin to be the peculiar property, the treasured possession of the Lord, who bought them with His blood. It is a point on which the Epistles insist frequently and with great earnestness. "Ye are not your own, for ye were bought with a price: glorify God therefore in your body."[3] "None of us liveth to himself, and none dieth to himself... for to this end Christ died and rose again that he might be lord of both the dead and the living."[4] "Thou wast slain, and didst purchase unto God with thy blood men of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and madest them to be unto our God a kingdom and priests."[5]

To the forgiven Jesus Christ is Lord, and they are

[1] 1 Pet. ii. 9 (where see Hort); the phrase used is λαὸς εἰς περιποίησιν, from Mal. iii. 17 (LXX).

[2] Exod. *l.c.*

[3] 1 Cor. vi. 19 f.

[4] Rom. xiv. 7-9.

[5] Apoc. v. 9.

His bond-slaves. Their wills have been captured by His love; they return it with a devotion which is in exact proportion to their sense of the debt for which He has secured for them remission. Our Lord is loved best and served most faithfully by those to whom most has been forgiven, or who are most alive to the greatness of the mercy which they have received. The world has been redeemed by the Sacrifice of the Cross; God was, in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself; the ascended Christ is at this moment the Propitiation for the whole world. But only those who have been reconciled to God, who have been won by the love of the Incarnation and the Passion, whose sins have been forgiven for His Name's sake, are actually His *peculium*—the possession which He treasures as the purchase of His life-blood. The forgiven belong to Him: they are the travail of His soul; they are the sheep for which He gave His life, and they shall never perish, unless through their own final rejection of the Lord, who bought them for His own.

2. The life of the forgiven is life in the Spirit of Christ. Remission of sins and the gift of the Spirit have been inseparable from the very beginning: "Repent and be baptized," St Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost, "and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost."[1] The water of baptism is the sign at

[1] Acts ii. 38.

once of "the mystical washing away of sin," and also of "the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost."[1] The two gifts go hand in hand through life: "if any man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his,"[2] is not in truth forgiven, does not belong to the possession which the Lord holds dear. The man who is "yet in his sins" is spiritually dead, although physically and intellectually he is alive; on that side of his nature which ought to be in living fellowship with the Divine and eternal, there is no movement, or none which argues vitality; his service of God, if he serves Him, is lifeless and formal; he is not stirred by the love of God, or disturbed by the fear of His wrath. In the forgiven "the spirit is life";[3] the Giver of Life has quickened it; it believes and prays, it hopes and loves and works. This is common to all who are Christ's; they all have the Spirit of God as the quickening, guiding, strengthening principle of life. In regard to the gifts of the Spirit there are wide differences between man and man; the Spirit divides to each severally even as He will. Some of the gifts of the earliest age seem to have ceased or to be in suspense;[4] working of miracles, prophecy, divers kinds of tongues, the interpretation of tongues, are either extinct or are manifested only on rare occasion and

[1] Tit. iii. 5. [2] Rom. viii. 9. [3] Rom. viii. 10.

[4] Cf. *The Holy Spirit in the Ancient Church*, p. 262.

within narrow limits. Other gifts which are still among us are denied to many sincere members of the Church. But the life of the Spirit is denied to none such; they were all made to drink of the one source of spiritual vitality;[1] they all continue to drink of it while life lasts. All such have at least the first-fruits of the Spirit, though it may be only one sheaf of the full harvest; all have the earnest of the Spirit in their hearts, though it may be only a poor instalment of the great heritage laid up for them in heaven.[2] All such mind the things of the Spirit, walk in the Spirit, sow to the Spirit, yield the fruit of the Spirit, some more abundantly, some less, but all in their measure. The Spirit leads, and they follow; all at a vast distance, with lagging, stumbling footsteps, but to the end.

3. The life of the forgiven on earth is not without sin. St John warns Christian people against saying in their hearts (for few or none would say it with their lips) 'We have no sin,' or 'We have not sinned.'[3] Our Lord has taught us to pray day by day, "Forgive us our debts." Daily forgiveness is not less necessary than daily bread. But the forgiven are on their way to sinlessness; that which the Incarnate

[1] 1 Cor. xii. 13.

[2] Rom. viii. 23 (ἀπαρχή), 2 Cor. i. 22, Eph. i. 14 (ἀρραβών).

[3] 1 John i. 8, 10 ἁμαρτίαν οὐκ ἔχομεν . . . οὐχ ἡμαρτήκαμεν. On the difference between the two statements see Westcott, *ad loc.*

Son possessed the adopted sons make their aim. Sinlessness, moral perfection, is the Christian goal and ideal; when a Christian sins he falls below the standard which Christ has set before him, which his conscience is ever calling him to apprehend. Moreover, his sins are not of the type which is known as deadly or mortal; they are not the deliberate, wilful transgressions which drive away the Spirit of Christ, and throw the forgiven servant back into the ranks of the unforgiven. They are the lighter or 'venial' sins, as St Augustine names them,[1] from which no human life on this earth is wholly free: lapses which sadden and weaken the new life of the Spirit, but do not extinguish it. And in the midst of these imperfections the struggle with sin is maintained, and on the whole with success. "They that are of Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with the passions and the lusts thereof";[2] the flesh, the seat of sinful passion, is not dead within them, but it is surely dying; it has been nailed to the Cross, and left there to perish. The same is true of the Christian's relation to the world; "through the Cross the world hath been crucified unto me, and I unto the world";[3] *i.e.* the undue power which outward things and human opinion once exerted over me is broken; the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the vainglory

[1] Aug. *de spiritu et litera*, 48, 65.

[2] Gal. v. 14. [3] Gal. vi. 14.

of life are of no more account in my estimation than the servants of Christ are in the judgement of the world. The world estimates men and things according to their surface value, as they contribute to wealth or comfort or other momentary gain ; the Church weighs them in the scales of eternal reality.

The forgiven, then, although not sinless, have entered the lists against sin, and especially against the sins by which they themselves are most easily beset and overcome. It is vain to claim or seek the forgiveness of sins so long as any sin is suffered to keep its hold upon the life or the heart. But if the struggle with sin is real and continual, the consciousness of past sins and many falls need be no bar to peace of mind or access to God. Reverses will humiliate and call for greater vigilance ; they will not suggest despair. So long as the fight is maintained, forgiveness is to be had ; and with forgiveness comes fresh strength and the hope of final victory.

The forgiveness of sins on earth is provisional and anticipatory, not final or irreversible. To the absolved sinner our Lord says, as He said to the man who walked again after thirty-eight years of impotence, "Behold thou art made whole ; sin no more, lest a worse thing befall thee."[1] The unmerciful servant in the parable, who had been forgiven a debt of ten

[1] John v. 14.

thousand talents, is delivered to the tormentors till he has paid all that was due; the remission of his debt is revoked. And that this is not part of the subsidiary imagery of the story, but an essential feature, appears from the Lord's comment upon it: "so (He explains) shall my heavenly Father do unto you, if ye forgive not every one his brother from your heart."[1]

We look then for the future judgement either to confirm the initial act of forgiveness and the absolutions of the Church, or to cancel them. The writers of the New Testament are careful to include the members of the Church among those who will stand before the judgement seat of God. The first act of the Master on His return is to make a reckoning with His servants. "He that judgeth me," St Paul exclaims, "is the Lord."[2] "We must all be made manifest before the judgement seat of Christ."[3] How this final judgement will be realized is immaterial. The throne of glory round which the angels gather as the bodyguard of the great Son of Man, the parting of the nations into two vast companies, the dialogue between the King Christ, and the evil and the good, belong to the scenery of the parable; the great white throne, the passing of heaven and earth, the opening of the books and

[1] Matt. xviii. 34 f.

[2] 1 Cor. iv. 5.

[3] Rom. xiv. 10, 2 Cor. v. 10. In John iii. 18, v. 24, 29 κρίνω and κρίσις have nearly the force of κατακρίνω, κατάκρισις: cf. Abbott, *Johannine Vocabulary*, p. 166.

the judging of the world according to their record, are features in an apocalyptic vision. It may be that each man's conscience, coming for the first time under the full light of the Divine Presence, will reveal to himself his true place in the new age which will open with the Parousia. This only we know—and it is enough—that all lives will be reviewed in the day of Christ, and all previous absolutions, whether those of the Church, or those pronounced by the judgements of men or of each man's own heart, will be submitted to a final test. No present absolution, not even that which is given by the Church in the Name of Christ, is unconditional; it assumes repentance, faith and love in the penitent. Whether these conditions have been fulfilled on the whole only the future judgement can determine. Life must be judged as a whole and judged by the All-seeing Eye, if the judgement is to be final and irreversible.

Thus a measure of uncertainty attaches to the forgiveness of sins as it is realized by us in the present life. St Paul, in the fulness of his evangelistic work, recognized the possibility that after having proclaimed to others the terms of the race and called the competitors to run, he himself might be rejected and refused the prize.[1] It is not till the end of his life is near at hand that he permits himself to feel sure of the reward—"henceforth there is laid up

[1] 1 Cor. ix. 27.

for me the crown of righteousness"—and even then he reserves the award to the Master at His coming.[1] But this uncertainty is not such as to disturb the tranquillity of the Christian soul in its passage through life. Though it cannot foresee the end, it can assure itself of present peace with God, and of free access to Him. The fear of final failure is with us only as a stimulus to vigilance and persevering effort. The good fight is not yet fought out nor the race won ; the goal is not here but at the tribunal of the returning Christ.

The full joy of forgiveness, then, is reserved for the life to come. Even the blessed dead who are with Christ and at rest have not yet heard the final absolution, although they can no longer doubt their acceptance and are growing ever more ready for the coming of the Judge. But it is in the Holy City of the age to come that the Reconciliation will be complete, and the forgiveness of sins perfected. "The people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity";[2] the life of the forgiven, matured and glorified, is the life of Heaven.

*We believe that Thou*, O Christ, *shalt come to be our Judge. We therefore pray Thee, help Thy servants, whom Thou hast redeemed with Thy precious blood.*

*O Lord, in Thee have I trusted ; let me never be confounded.*

[1] 2 Tim. iv. 7 f. [2] Isa. xxxiii. 24.

## ADDITIONAL NOTE

### ON THE TERMS FOR SIN AND FORGIVENESS IN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS

1. The generic words for sin both in Hebrew and Greek (חַטָּא, *ἁμαρτία*) are from roots which denote the missing of a mark, or the falling short of an appointed end. Thus in Job v. 24 לֹא תֶחֱטָא A.V. "thou shalt not sin," is rendered in R.V. "thou shalt miss nothing"; and in Rom. iii. 23 *ἥμαρτον* is coupled with *ὑστεροῦνται*. From this sense the nouns pass by an easy transition to moral failure, the falling short of the purpose of life which the Creator has set before His rational creatures. The reader will find it instructive to refer to the use of *ἁμαρτάνω* in classical Greek (Liddell and Scott, *s.v.*) and to the examples given from the Greek of the papyri by Moulton and Milligan, *Vocabulary of the G.T.*, *s.vv.* *ἁμαρτάνω*, *ἁμάρτημα*, *ἁμαρτία*.

Of the two noun-forms, *ἁμαρτία* and *ἁμάρτημα*, the former is (1) "sin in the abstract as well as in the concrete," (2) "the act of sinning" (Trench, *Synonyms of the N.T.* xvi.); the latter (Mc. iii. 28 f., Rom. iii. 25, 1 Cor. vi. 18, 2 Pet. i. 9 (?)) is the act of sin, the sin committed.

Other terms for sin represent it in its different aspects. There are many such—"a mournfully numerous group of words," as Trench describes his own list of Greek synonyms

of ἁμαρτία. In the O.T. we find amongst others אָשָׁם (sin as guilt), מַעַל (sin as unfaithfulness to God), עָוֶל, עַוְלָה (injustice), עָוֹן (iniquity), פֶּשַׁע (transgression), רָעָה (evil), רֶשַׁע (wickedness). The Greek Old Testament and the New Testament are yet more prolific in such words: thus we have ἀγνόημα (Heb. ix. 7), ἀδικία, ἀνομία, ἀσέβεια, ἥττημα (1 Cor. vi. 7), κακία, παρακοή, παράβασις, παρανομία (2 Pet. ii. 16), παράπτωμα, πονηρία. Each of these words has a distinctive meaning, answering to one particular point of view. Sin is 'transgression' (παράβασις), inasmuch as it passes the bounds which God sets to human action. Or it is a 'falling away' from the divinely ordered course of duty (παράπτωμα). Or again it is 'breach of laws' (ἀνομία, παρανομία), or 'disobedience' to the voice of God (παρακοή). Or it is 'unrighteousness' (ἀδικία), or 'viciousness' (κακία), 'active evil' (πονηρία), 'impiety' (ἀσέβεια). Or it is 'ignorance' (ἀγνόημα) and 'defect' (ἥττημα). In addition to these more general terms there is a great abundance of words which denote particular sins, and lists of these may be found in such passages as Mark vii. 21 f., Rom. i. 29 ff., Gal. v. 20 f., Eph. iv. 31, v. 3 ff., Col. iii. 5 ff. The Greek world yielded to St Paul an abundance of words descriptive of sins, which were almost unknown to Palestine.

2. The Old Testament has three verbs expressing the act of forgiveness: (1) נָשָׂא, 'take away,' rendered by ἀφιέναι in the LXX (Gen. iv. 14, l. 17; Exod. xxxii. 32; Ps. xxiv. (xxv.) 18, xxxi. (xxxii.) 1, 5, lxxxiv. (lxxxv.) 2; Isa. xxxiii. 24); and by αἴρειν in 1 Sam. (Regu.) xv. 25. (2) סָלַח 'pardon' (used of God only), LXX, ἀφιέναι.[1] (3) כָּפַר 'cover,' used (*a*) of the priest who propitiates by means of

[1] The LXX gives ἱλασμός for סְלִיחָה in Ps. cxxix. (cxxx.) 4.

a legal atonement; (*b*) of God, who is propitiated, and ignores the sin, treating it as if it were covered up out of His sight. (Cp. καλύπτει (-ψει) πλῆθος ἁμαρτιῶν, quoted in 1 Pet. iv. 8, James v. 20, from Prov. x. 12, where, however, a different verb is used.) The LXX translate כִּפֶּר by ἱλάσκεσθαι (Ps. lxiv. (lxv.) 3, lxxvii. (lxxviii.) 38, cxxix. (cxxx.) 9).

3. The usual N.T. verb for 'forgive' is ἀφιέναι, and forgiveness is ἄφεσις. Ἀφιέναι is, properly, to let go, to set loose; thus in the LXX we find ἀφιέναι φωνήν, κτῆνος, χρέος, and ἀφέσεις ὑδάτων (Joel i. 20), ἀφ. θαλάσσης (2 Sam. (Regu.) xxii. 16). Similarly, the papyri speak of an ἄφεσις ὑδάτων in Egypt for the purpose of irrigation, and an ἄφεσις χρημάτων, *i.e.* a release from debt. The year of jubile is repeatedly called in the Greek O.T. the ἐνιαυτὸς ἀφέσεως, *i.e.* the year of discharge from bondage and remission of debts. It may have been the last-named application of the term which led to the Christian use of the phrase ἄφεσις ἁμαρτιῶν (cf. Luke iv. 18 f.). The Gospel fulfilled the ideals of the Hebrew jubile.

For ἀφιέναι, χαρίζεσθαι is used once by St Luke (Luke vii. 42), and several times by St Paul (2 Cor. ii. 7, 10 f., xii. 13; Eph. iv. 32; Col. ii. 13, iii. 13). For ἄφεσις St Paul substitutes πάρεσις in Rom. iii. 25, but with a well-marked difference of meaning; see above, pp. 30, 79.

Ἀφιέναι is placed by our Lord (John xx. 25) in strong contrast to κρατεῖν. He who 'remits' sins releases the sinner from the hold which his sins had upon him; he who 'retains' sins withholds for the time the release which the Gospel brings and the Church administers. Both powers were committed by our Lord to the Church, and are committed by the Church to her ministers, whose responsibility it is to use one or the other as circumstances require. Even

apart from any exercise of discretion, the ministry of Reconciliation necessarily has a double effect, according to the character of the men to whom it comes: οἷς μὲν (*sc.* τοῖς ἀπολλυμένοις) ὀσμή [ἐσμεν] ἐκ θανάτου εἰς θάνατον, οἷς δὲ (*sc.* τοῖς σωζομένοις) ὀσμὴ ἐκ ζωῆς εἰς ζωήν (2 Cor. ii. 16). In the former case it retains sins, in the latter it remits them. Well may St Paul add: καὶ τίς πρὸς ταῦτα ἱκανός; . . . ἀλλ' ἡ ἱκανότης ἡμῶν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ.

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